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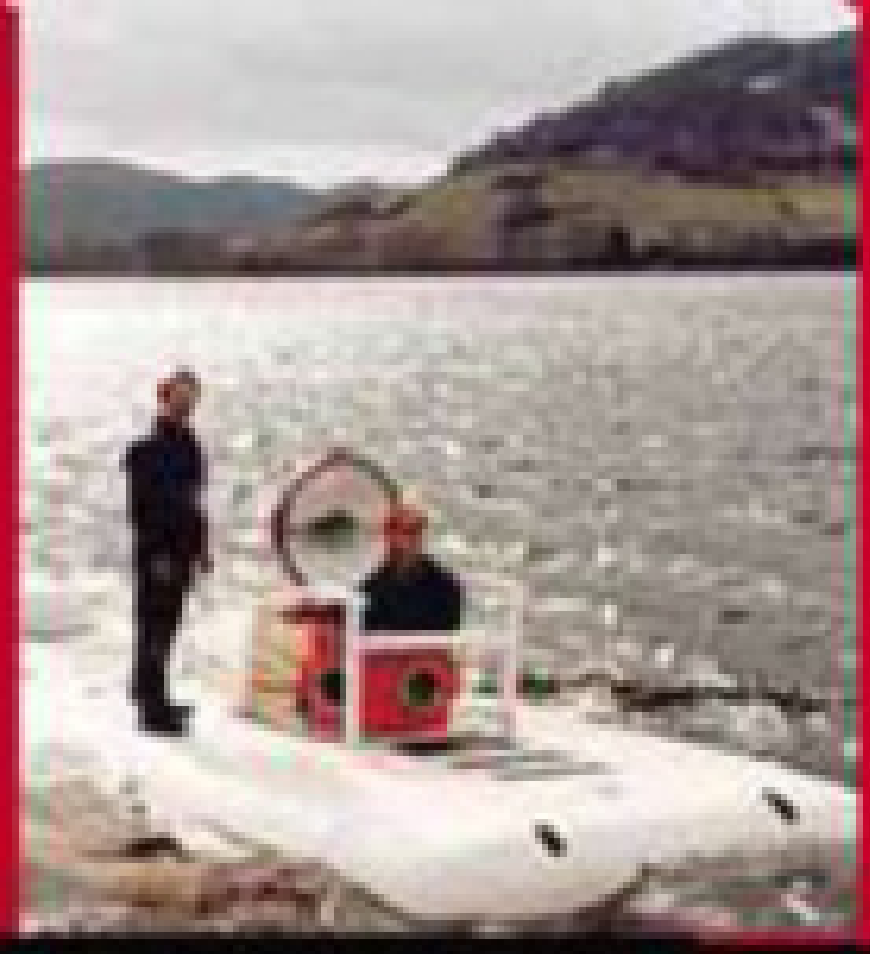

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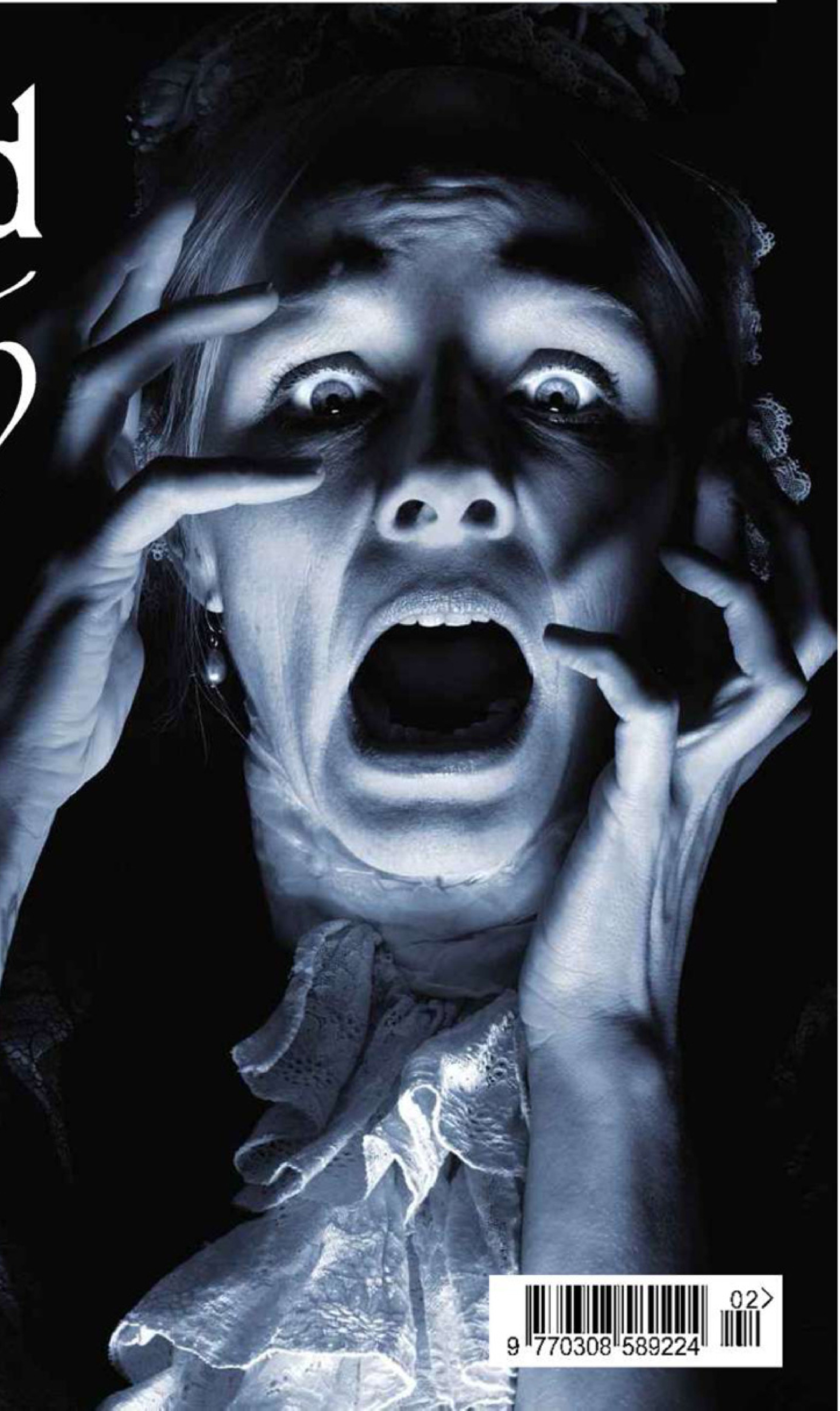

Scared to Death

How one woman's ghostly encounter proved fatal...

THE CURSE OF MARS

ARE ALL MISSIONS TO THE RED PLANET DOOMED TO DISASTER?

BELIEVING BRAINS

ARE HUMANS HARD-WIRED TO BELIEVE IN THE SUPERNATURAL?

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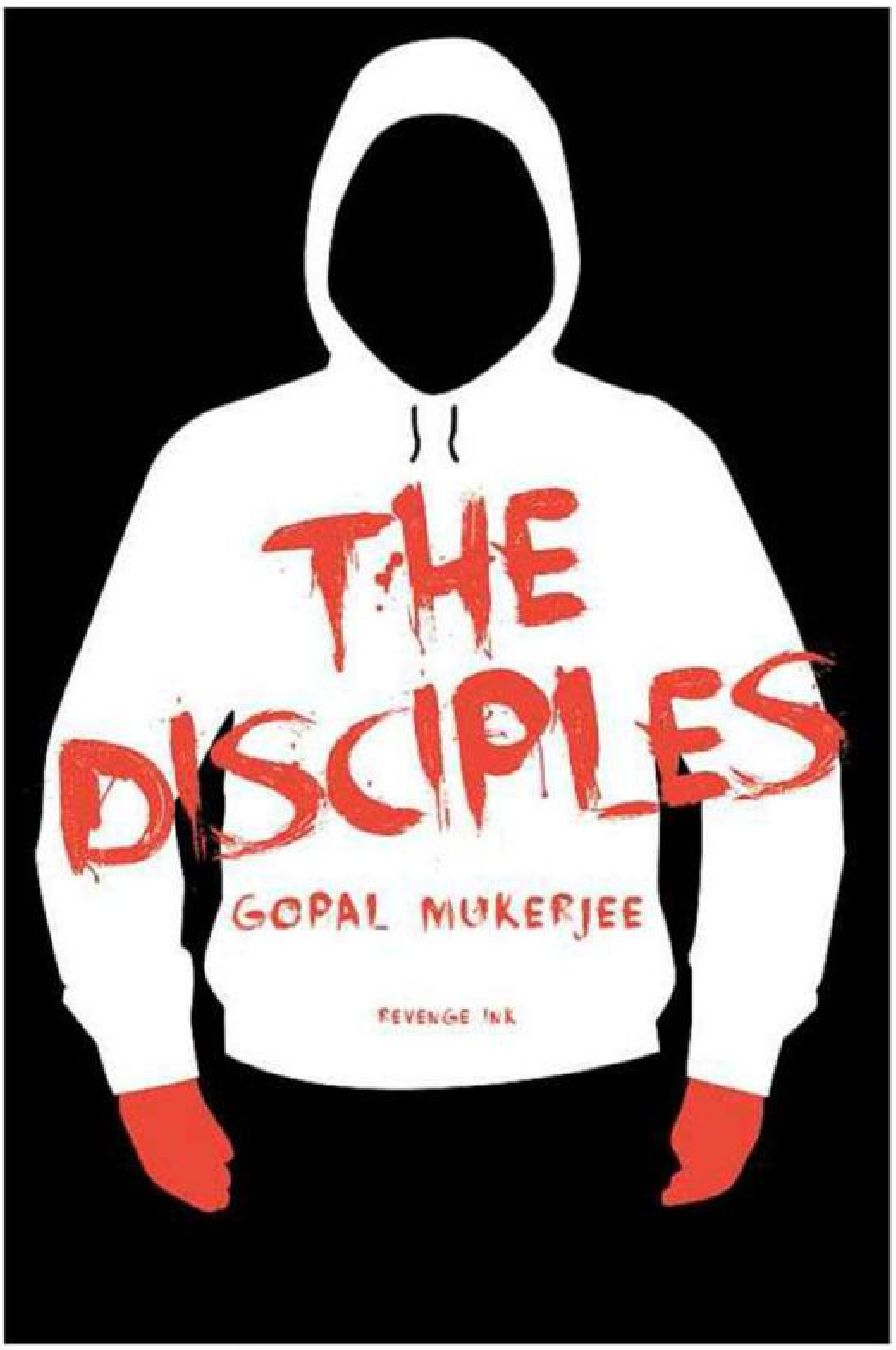
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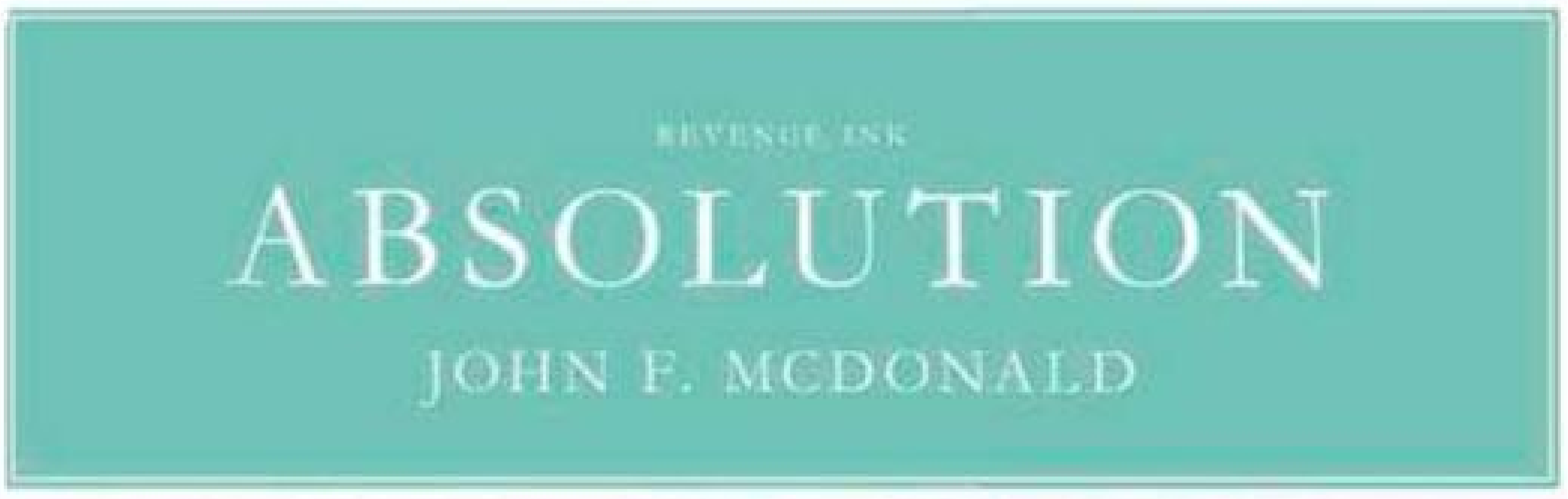
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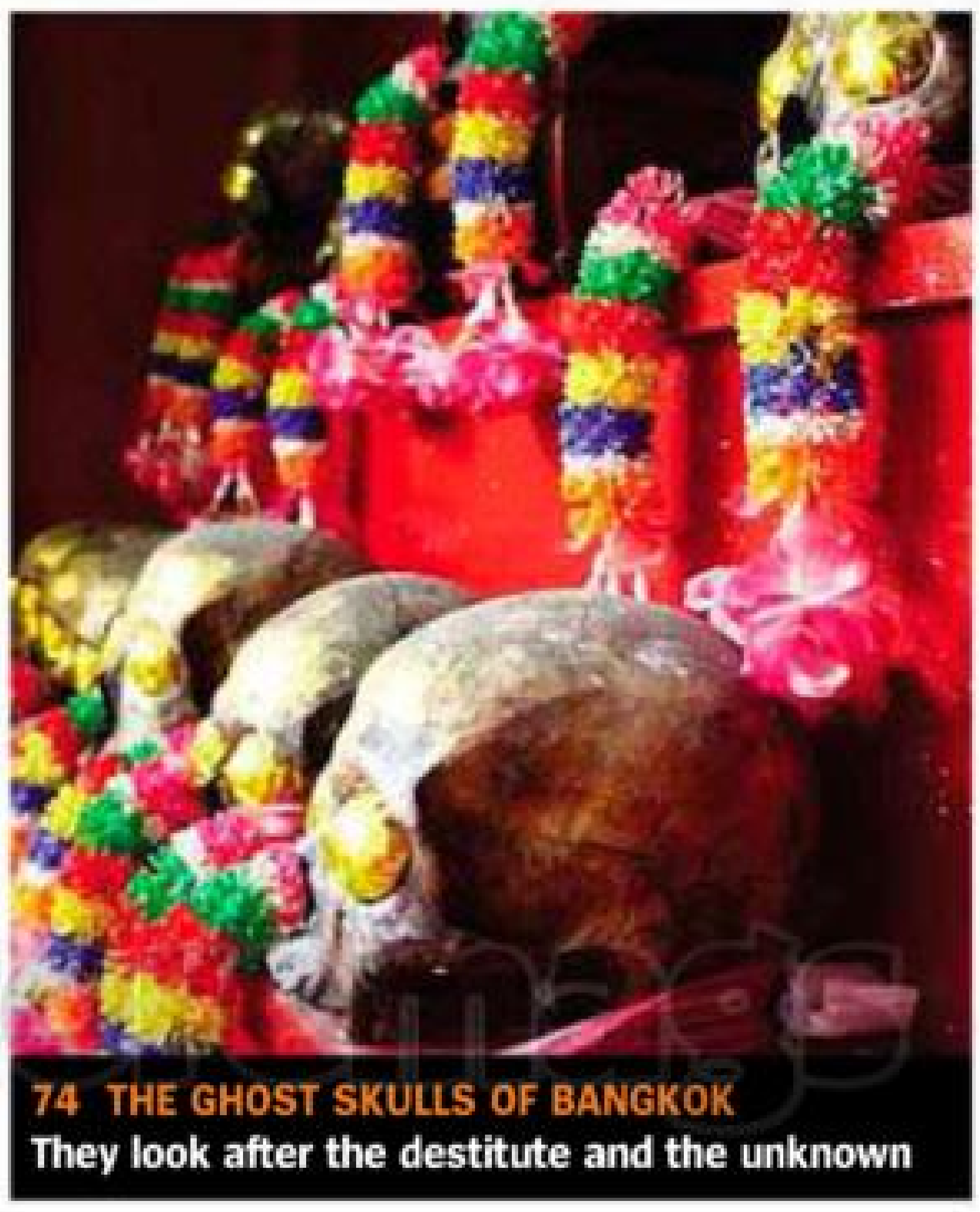

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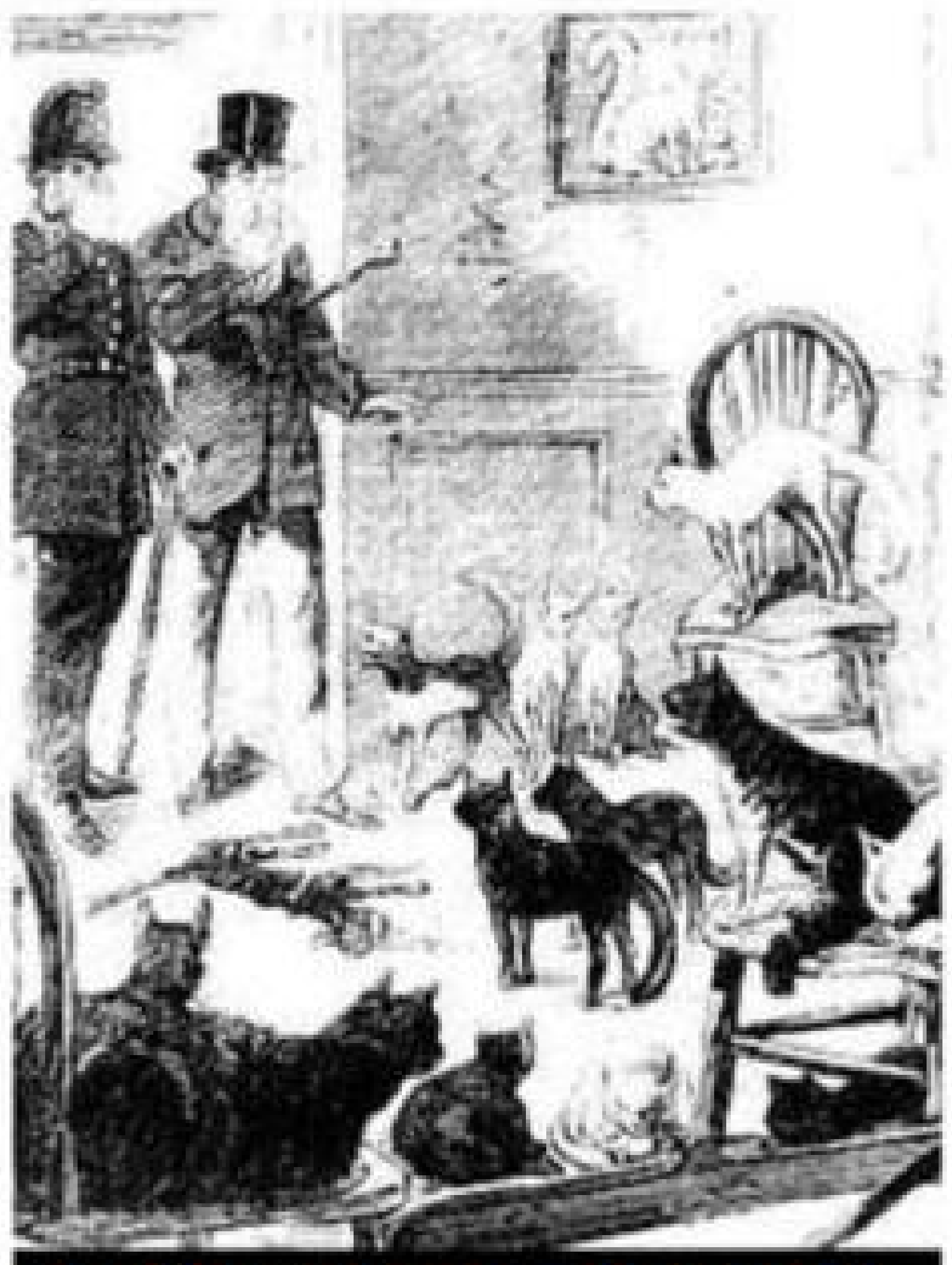

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editorial

Belief and beyond

Welcome to the first issue of 2012, which should – if assorted New Age pundits, jittery economists and apocalyptic doomsayers are right – prove an interesting year. Eurogeddon, pole-shifts, the 'end of the Mayan Calendar'. We have all this, and more, to look forward to – and we'll be devoting next issue to examining the deep roots and contemporary manifestations of the 2012 mythos.

Meanwhile, we start the year with less alarming fare – fatal ghosts, flying men, more forteana in the movies and a first-hand account of UnCon-vention 2011 (pp26–29).

In our cover story (pp34–39), David Clarke unearths a fascinating case from Victorian Sheffield in which a 48-year-old woman called Hannah Rallison (or Rollinson; as in many a fortean case, a key player's name appears uncertain) was supposedly scared to death by a ghost. It sounds like a tall tale, but we have the evidence of the death certificate, in which the coroner recorded that Hannah suffered "sudden death in a fit *believed to have been brought on by fright*."

Whether or not Hannah really saw a 'ghost' is something we cannot establish for certain; neither can we say definitively that she was in some sort of delusional state. The fact of her being 'scared to death', though, seems undeniable, and is (as David points out) far from unique in 19th-century ghost-lore. What does seem significant, though, is the context of belief in which her particular tragedy played out – a background of working class spiritualism and Mormonism that was also deeply unpopular with the authorities and other sectors of the society in which she lived.

Elsewhere in this issue (pp54–55), Lawrence R Samuel looks at some of the explanations from psychology, sociology and anthropology of why human belief in the supernatural is such a powerful, and not notably rational, force. It may be, as Lawrence suggests, that neuroscience will provide the answers; if it can be determined that we are 'hardwired' to believe in a non-physical reality, encompassing everything from gods to ghosts, then Hannah Rallison's death by supernatural causes becomes somewhat easier to understand – an admittedly extreme example of a perfectly normal human state of consciousness.

This possibly innate 'will to believe', often in the face of overwhelming negative evidence, may also lie behind the huge popularity of modern-day psychics such as Sally Morgan, whose antics are a constant irritant to those self-appointed guardians of rationality, the 'skeptics'. Sometimes, though, as Gordon Rutter shows (p53), the will to disbelief can lead the skeptics to accept as 'definitive evidence' anecdotes so flimsy they would make a fortean blush… as long as said 'evidence' supports their own world view.

Goodbye, Joe

Just around the corner from Fortean Towers there is a little newsagent's shop from which we have long purchased our Curly Wurlys, Jelly Tots and Woodbines. Until very recently, the proprietor was a particularly friendly fellow by the name of Joe Parmar (below). Joe was about to move on to other premises, but before he left we discovered – in a typical fortean 'coincidence' – that Joe harboured a connection to *FT* that we'd never suspected.

ForteanTimes
ALIEN INVASION
ForteanTimes
The Ghosts of Versailles

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Joe and his brother Brij, it turns out, hold the lease on another building – a DIY store at 39 Marchmont Street. This was, of course, the address at which Charles Fort lived from 1921 to 1928 during his sojourn in England (and is now marked by a plaque erected by *FT*). What's more, Joe and Brij also rent out the flat above the shop in which Charles and Anna Fort actually lived. Strange to say, they had a few odd stories of their own to add to our stock of Fort-lore. Tenants of the flat have reported odd noises and curtains moving of their own accord, while in the shop downstairs items have been know to 'fall' from their shelves for no apparent reason. Fort himself experienced classic 'poltergeist' phenomena while living at 39 Marchmont Street (more on this in an upcoming issue), including pictures falling mysteriously and repeatedly from the walls of the flat!

Oddest of all, Joe's sister reported seeing a ghostly, bearded gentleman in Edwardian dress at the back of the shop one day; thankfully, he seemed a benign rather than menacing presence.

We can't help wondering whether Fort, whose outfits were probably not of the latest fashion, ever grew a beard during his London years…

DAVID SUTTON

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Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

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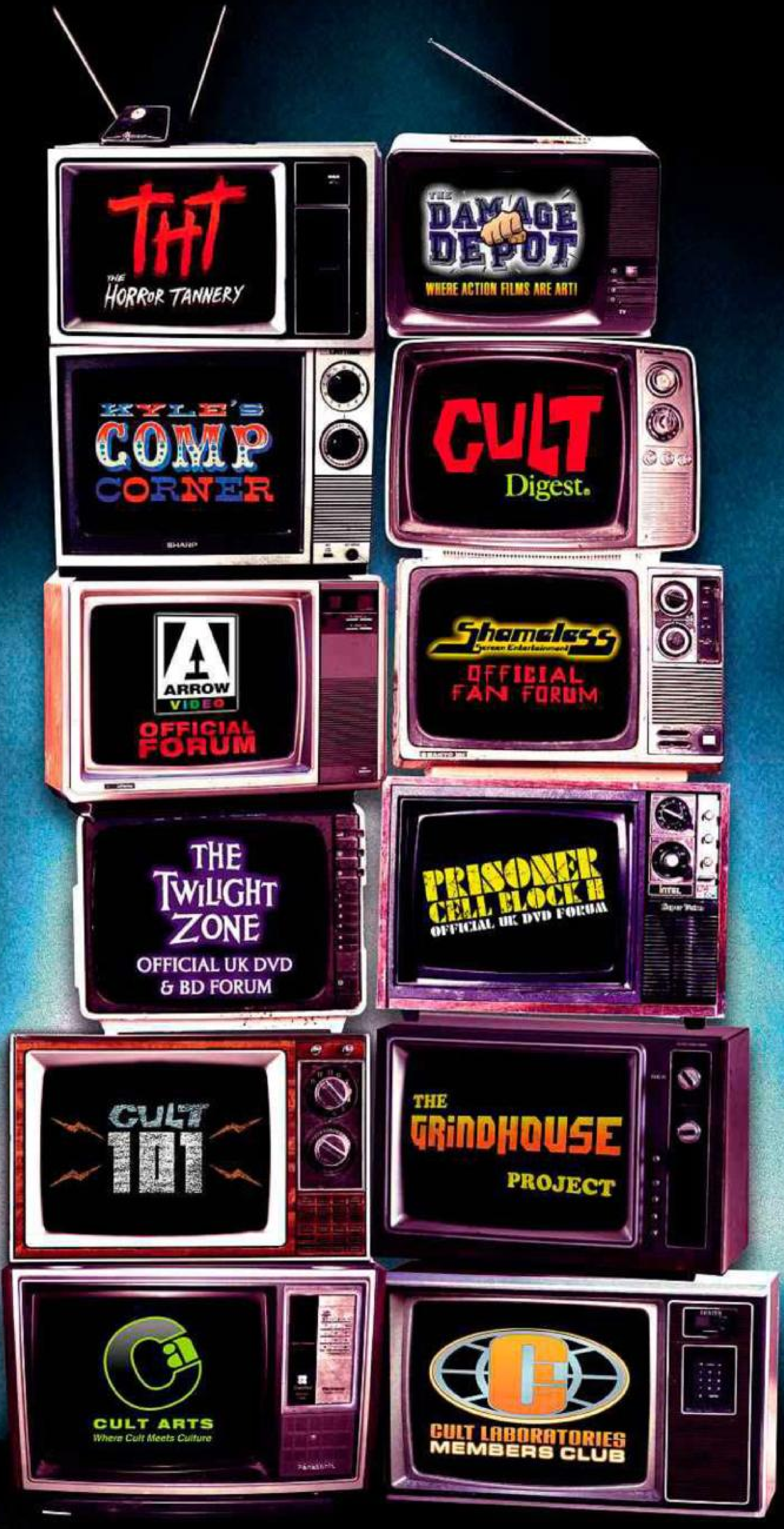
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Earthlike planet found

As the search for exoplanets continues, the Universe remains as baffling as ever to astronomers

ASTRONOMICAL MYSTERIES

In early December 2008, Australian astronomers looking for possible laser pulses from distant civilisations detected an unidentified signal. "It may be a glitch in our equipment, or some astrophysical phenomenon (e.g. an optical pulsar) or some unknown source. We are still investigating it," said Dr Ragbir Bhathal, head of the Oz OSETI Project at the University of Western Sydney.

Contrary to the classical Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) that is hunting for intelligent radio signals from outer space, so-called OSETI is searching for strong optical laser pulses or strong laser flashes. "For an advanced civilisation, radio wave technology would be old hat," said Dr Bhathal. "My strong feeling is that if there are civilisations out there, they will send the signal by laser pulses or laser flashes."

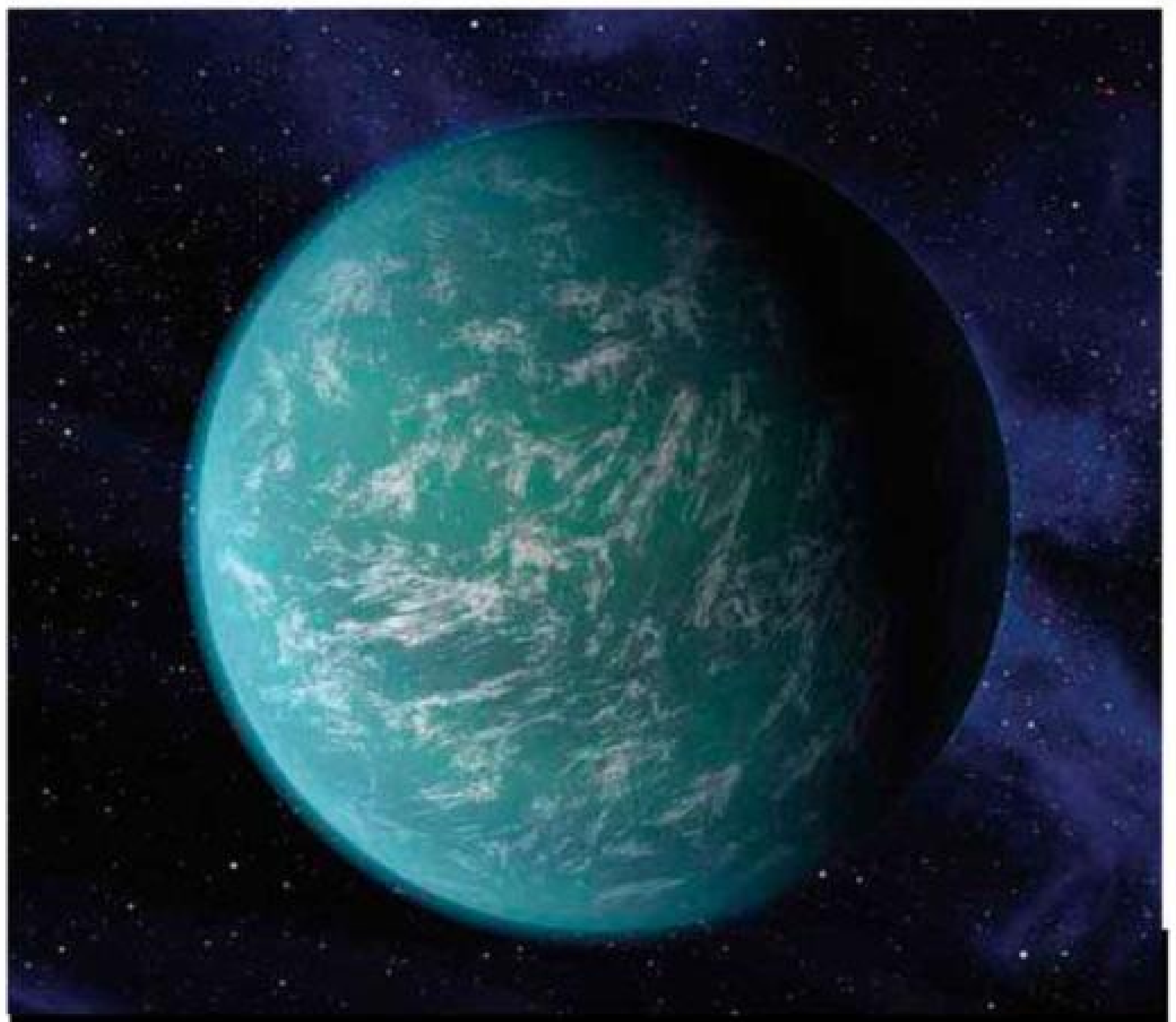
To be treated as an official intelligent signal from an alien civilisation, the 2008 pulse would have had to be repeated several times, so that its existence could be confirmed and analysed by other astronomers.

Still, it created enough enthusiasm within Dr Bhathal's team to mark it with a "Was it ET?" comment, reminiscent of the famous "Wow" note next to the detection of a strong narrowband radio signal detected by Dr Jerry R Ehman on 15 August 1977 while working on a SETI project at the Big Ear radio telescope of Ohio State University. Most researchers agree that the "Wow Signal" came from interstellar space, while its nature still remains a mystery. *Grenz Wissenschaft-Aktuell, 16 May 2009.*

An unknown object in the nearby galaxy M82 has been sending out radio signals, and the emission doesn't look like anything seen anywhere in the Universe before. "We don't know what it is," said co-discoverer Tom Muxlow of Jodrell Bank Centre for Astrophysics near Macclesfield.

The things appeared in May 2009, while Muxlow and his colleagues were monitoring an unrelated stellar explosion in M82, using the Merlin network of radio telescopes in the UK. A bright spot of radio emission emerged over only a few days, quite rapidly in astronomical terms. It didn't fit the pattern of radio emissions from supernovæ; they usually get brighter over a few weeks and then fade away over months, with the spectrum of radiation changing all the while.

The M82 source hardly changed in brightness over the first year of observation, and its spectrum was steady – but it did seem to be moving sideways at four times the speed of light. Such superluminal motion had been seen before in jets of material squirted out by some black holes. The stuff in these jets is moving towards us at a slight angle and travelling at a fair fraction of the speed of light, and the effects of relativity produce a kind of optical illusion that makes the motion appear superluminal. *New Scientist, 14 April 2010.*



NASA / AMES / JPL-CALTECH

MOVING HOME?

A second home for humanity might possibly have been identified. The planet Kepler-22b (artist's impression above) is thought to have both land and water, an average temperature of 22°C (72°F), and an atmosphere suitable for supporting life. However, it is 600 light years away, so there's no point in packing our bags until better transport is available. The planet's "Goldilocks" attributes – not too cold, not too hot, but just right for liquid water – depends on the distance from the star it orbits, which could almost be a twin for our own Sun.

The planet's year of 290 days is close to ours, but it is about 2.4 times the size of Earth, so it could be more like the gas-and-liquid Neptune – mostly ocean, with only a rocky core. It was first glimpsed in 2009 by the Kepler planet-hunting telescope, and in early 2011 French astronomers confirmed it met key requirements for sustaining life. Bill Borucki, the Kepler principal investigator at NASA's Ames Research Center, said: "We are certain that it is in the habitable zone and if it has a surface it ought to have a nice temperature."

So far the Kepler telescope has spotted 2,326 candidate planets outside our Solar System, with 139 of them potentially habitable ones. Kepler-22b is closer to Earth in size, temperature and star characteristics than either of the two previously announced planets in the habitable zone. *D.Telegraph, Times, Washington Post, 6 Dec 2011.*

ROADKILL RECIPES
Scraping up an appetising menu – from the tarmac
PAGE 10

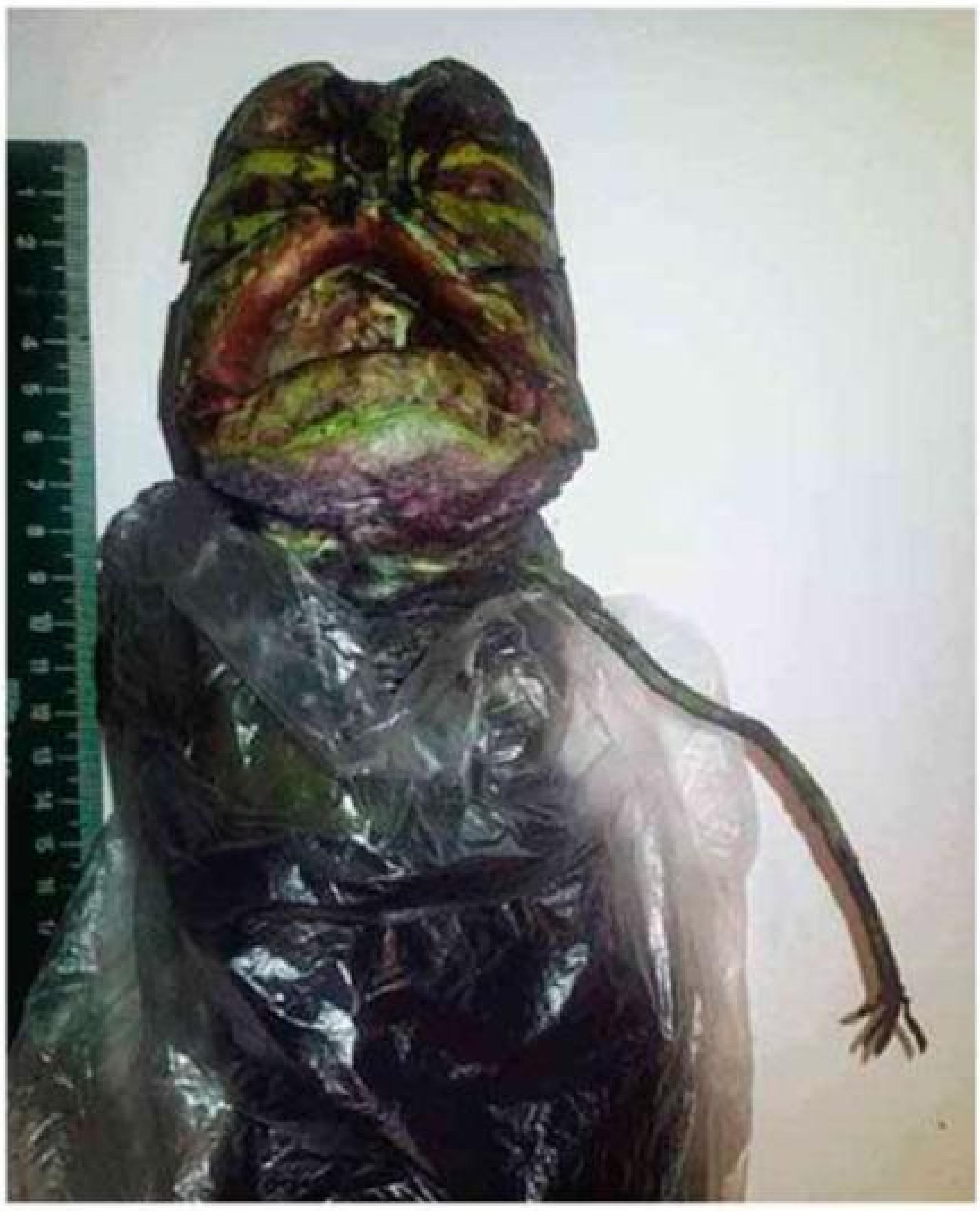
MARS ATTACKS
Why is the Red Planet so hard for space research?
PAGE 16

HONEY, I'M GAY
The rugby player whose sexuality changed after a failed backflip
PAGE 21

Latest alien body

This 2ft (60cm)-long "creature" was allegedly found by Marta Yegorovnam near the flaming wreckage of a crashed UFO beside her summerhouse in the western Russian city of Petrozavodsk. She claims to have heard a deafening crash one evening in 2009, and ventured out to discover flaming wreckage, "unbearably hot" crumpled metal, and the dead "extraterrestrial", which was initially in a spacesuit. (So what happened to that?) She wrapped the alien in plastic and put it in the fridge, not telling anyone about it for two years. (Why? we might well ask.) Then in November 2011, two men allegedly turned up at her house claiming to be from the Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences and seized the vegetable (or whatever the hell it is), but this has not been confirmed. "This could be an elaborate hoax, said 'paranormal writer' Michael Cohen. "However, the possibility that it might be a genuine alien should not be discounted." Well, yes, anything is *possible*, if vanishingly unlikely. Incidentally, why are hoaxes always qualified as "elaborate"? Let's hear it for simple, unadorned hoaxes! *Metro, Sun, D.Mirror, 16 Nov 2011.*

Crowds in Moscow's Bolotnaya Square to protest recent election results and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's decision to stand in 2012 to recover his position as President were amazed by an object in the sky, described as having pulsating coloured lights and five extended tendrils or pylons emanating from the body of the vehicle. *telegraph.co.uk, 12 Dec 2011.*



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EXTRA! EXTRA! FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Queen hangs out with Ireland's finest studs

Toronto Star, 20 May 2011.

Savage will be dinner speaker

(Wolverhampton) Express & Star, 3 June 2011.

Rhinos at school race event

Yorkshire Evening Post, 28 May 2011.

Demons are put to bed

Western Daily Press, 29 April 2011.

Eagles to turn back time at Hop Farm

Downsmail (Maidstone, Kent), –June 2011.

Slime mould prefers sedatives, say researchers

BBC News, 10 June 2011.

Presbyterian leaders hail end to PMS crisis

Belfast News, 9 June 2011.

Darkness visible only to a few

Yorkshire Post, 11 May 2011.

Lucifer denies growing cannabis plants

Central Somerset Gazette, 26 May 2011.

Cucumber death toll rises to 16

Metro, 1 June 2011.

Gateshead woman denies biting off testicles

BBC News, 21 April 2011.

NIGHT OF THE DEMONS

Masked members of the Koatlacker devil's association (Koatlacker Fuifi) dress as demonic creatures to take part in the annual Krampus procession on 4 December 2011 in Prad, near Merano in Italy. In this traditional celebration, which survives across southern Germany, Austria and Italy's Tyrol, participants don elaborate masks, some of which are centuries old, and pose as devils accompanying St Nicholas on his visits to little children.

ALL PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES / JOHANNES SIMON

SIDELINES...

GRAVE ERASED

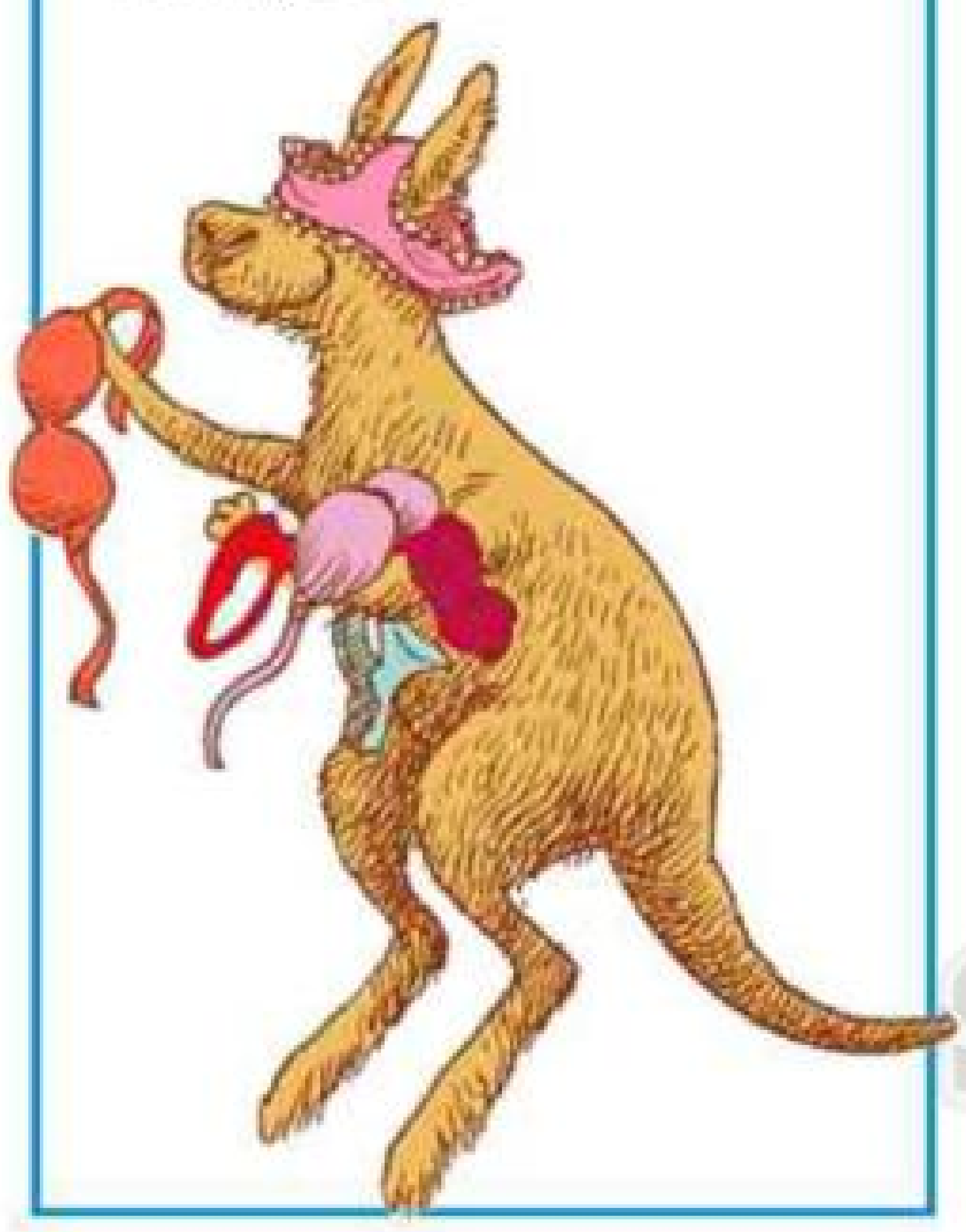
The remains of Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess (1894–1987) were exhumed from the graveyard in the Bavarian town of Wunsiedel on 20 July, and later cremated and scattered in a lake at a secret location. This was to prevent the pilgrimage of neo-Nazis to his grave on the anniversary of his death (17 August). It also eliminates the possibility of DNA testing to establish whether "Prisoner 7" in Spandau jail was an impostor. *D.Telegraph, Int. Herald Tribune, parapolitical.com, 22 July 2011.*

WINDSOR HUM

Since March 2011, residents of south and west Windsor, Ontario, have been puzzled by vibrations of unknown origin. "It's a very sharp, consistent rumble sound," said city Councillor Al Maghnieh. "Sometimes it's like a hum. It sent shivers up my spine." The Ministry of the Environment ruled out industrial sources. *National Post (Toronto), 13 Aug 2011.*

KNICKER NICKER

Benji the kinky kangaroo escaped from his owners' home in Prague, Czech Republic, and bounced from garden to garden "collecting" women's underwear from washing lines. After the police caught him, owner Petr Hlabov, 35, said: "I've no idea what he thought he was up to – he certainly didn't pick up the habit from me." *The Zimbabwean (Harare), 25 Aug 2011.*



MARTIN ROSS

The roadside picnic

Drivers are filling their larders from nature's delicatessen

CATERS NEWS / ROGER MODDY

ABOVE: Alison Brierley found her pregnancy gave her roadkill cravings.

Jonathan McGowan, a 44-year-old conservationist from Dorset, has spent 30 years eating only roadkill (though presumably he tucks into fruit and veg as well). Advantages of the roadkill diet, apart from cost, are that the animals are naturally high in vitamins and proteins with lean meat and little saturated fat, and generally free of additives and drugs. Worms can be a concern, so the meat should be well cooked.

The term "Roadkill Café" is sometimes considered a joke, with the tagline "You kill it, we grill it". However, there are several real Roadkill Cafés, none known to be associated with each other. In the US, Jeff Eberbaugh's *Gourmet Style Road Kill Cooking and Other Fine Recipes* (1991) gives advice on converting roadside opossum, deer, turtle or skunk carcases into tasty treats and tells you how to prepare squirrel pot pie, groundhog hoagies, creamed coon casserole and road kill stir-fry.

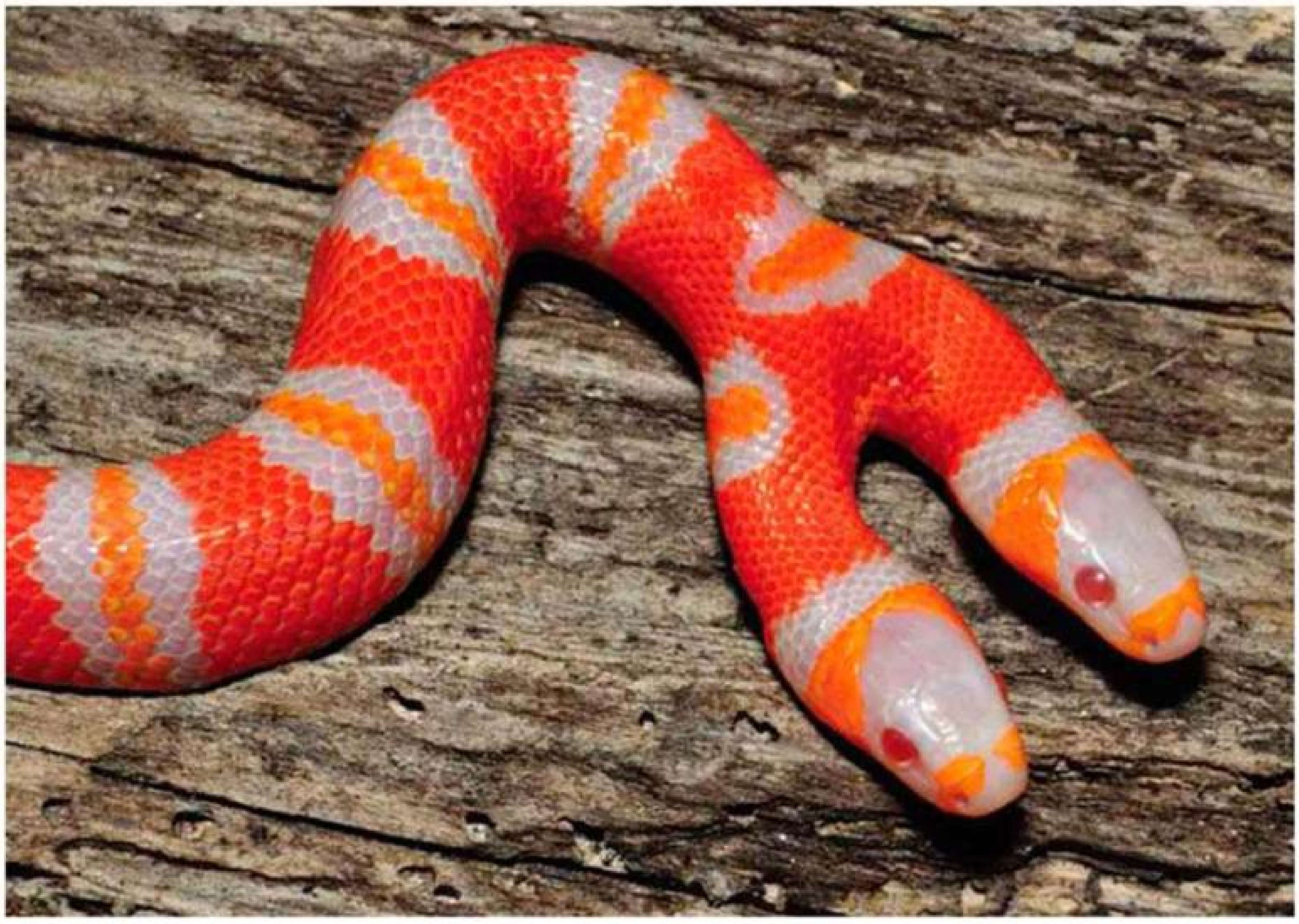
"It's more gamey than other meat and I love the taste"

McGowan, who has never fallen ill from his diet, makes owl curries and rat stirfries because he doesn't like the way farmed animals are treated. (It should be pointed out, however, that eating rats can be risky because of Weil's disease.) McGowan holds roadkill parties and first got a taste for free meat when he cooked an adder in butter. He says a speciality is pan-fried crane flies. "I don't eat the legs, though," he said. "That would be weird." *Metro, 14 Oct 2011.*

Alison Brierley loves roadkill. The 42-year-old artist and taxidermist from Harrogate, Yorkshire, is due to give birth in February. "Usually, I eat really healthily but now I'm pregnant I get cravings for roadkill," she said. "It's more gamey than other meat and I love the taste. I don't feel guilty about eating it as I know it's had a completely free-range and natural life." She and her partner Marcus Speer, 44, live a nomadic life and say they had eaten roadkill before, but Ms Brierley insists her cravings have only been brought on by her pregnancy. She has even started hosting regular roadkill dinner parties. "I get the best meat from friends who ring me up to tell me about a kill they've spotted on their way to work," she said, "but most of my foraging is opportunistic and I don't go out looking for carcases." Her first roadkill meal came after she found a dead pheasant, which she marinated in olive oil for four days. "I made a kind of Kentucky fried pheasant dish," she said. "I've tried deer, pigeon, rabbit, owls and partridges, but pheasant is still the staple because it's so common. I would like to try fox and badger, but they're never in good enough condition to eat." *Metro, MX News (Sydney), 9 Nov 2011.*

stormags.com

CURIOUS CREATURES



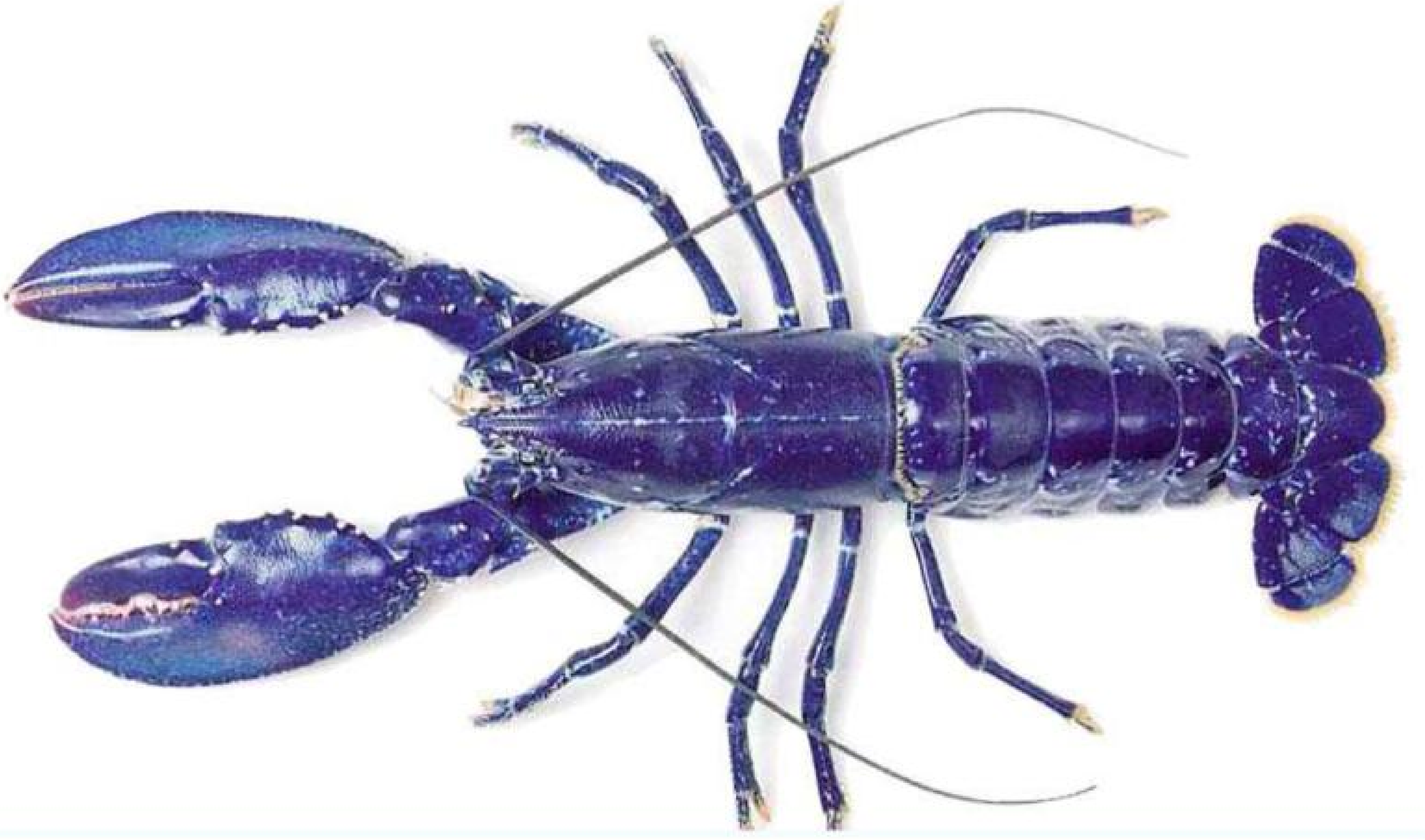
ASSOCIATED PRESS

DOUBLE TROUBLE

This two-headed albino Honduran milk-snake (above) hatched in late October and is being cared for at the University of Central Florida. Biologist Daniel Parker said two-headed snakes have been known to live up to 20 years in captivity, but with two brains giving commands, such snakes would have a difficult time surviving in the wild. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 3 Nov 2011.*

BLUE LOBSTER SAVED

This electric blue crustacean (below) was caught off Scotland's east coast and sent to London's Billingsgate Market. Rex Goldsmith, 45, buying supplies for his Chelsea Fishmonger shop, thought he was too beautiful to eat; he bought him for £10 and handed him over to the Natural History Museum. "It's the most striking blue lobster I have seen in 30 years in the business and was too nice to put in a pot and boil," he said. The museum believed the European lobster, usually dark grey, was a genetic variant. He was named Lionel and put on display at the London Aquarium. *D.Mirror, D.Mail, 17 Nov 2011.*



NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM / SOLENT

SIDELINES...

HEART OF JESUS

A "miracle" communion wafer with a dark spot that was claimed to be the heart of Jesus was celebrated at a special Catholic Mass in the eastern Polish town of Sokolka on 2 October. The wafer developed a brown spot in 2008 after falling on the floor during a service in the church of St Anthony, and two doctors later claimed the mark was heart muscle tissue. *Metro, 3 Oct 2011.*

DORSET HOPPER

At 7am on 18 May, Jan Cooper, 61, spotted a wallaby in her garden in Lyme Regis, Dorset, and managed to capture it on video before it bounded away. It was rugby-tackled the next day and taken to an animal park in Exminster, Devon. No one knew where it had come from – but wild wallabies have been sighted from Ashdown Forest in East Sussex to the Lickey Hills outside Birmingham, and a feral population of more than 100 lives on the Isle of Man. *Metro, 19+20 May 2011.*

PLANT EATS BIRD

Nigel Hewett-Cooper, a nurseryman from West Pennard, Somerset, found the remains of a blue tit in his monkey cup pitcher plant (*Nepenthes x mixta*). "In the wild [in southeast Asia] they have been known to kill mice and the largest pitcher plants kill rats," he said. "But for a plant in Britain to kill a fully-grown blue tit is amazing." The carnivorous plants exude sticky sweet nectar, which traps their prey (mostly insects). *D.Telegraph, Sun, 4 Aug; BBC News, 5 Aug 2011.*

CRAP ALCHEMIST

A Northern Irish man's plan to turn his excrement into gold landed him a three-month jail sentence for arson and endangering life. Paul Moran, 30, caused £3,000 damage to his government-subsidised flat in Enniskillen when he placed his fæces on an electric heater. *MX News (Sydney), 21 Oct 2011.*

SIDELINES...

HOLY BONES

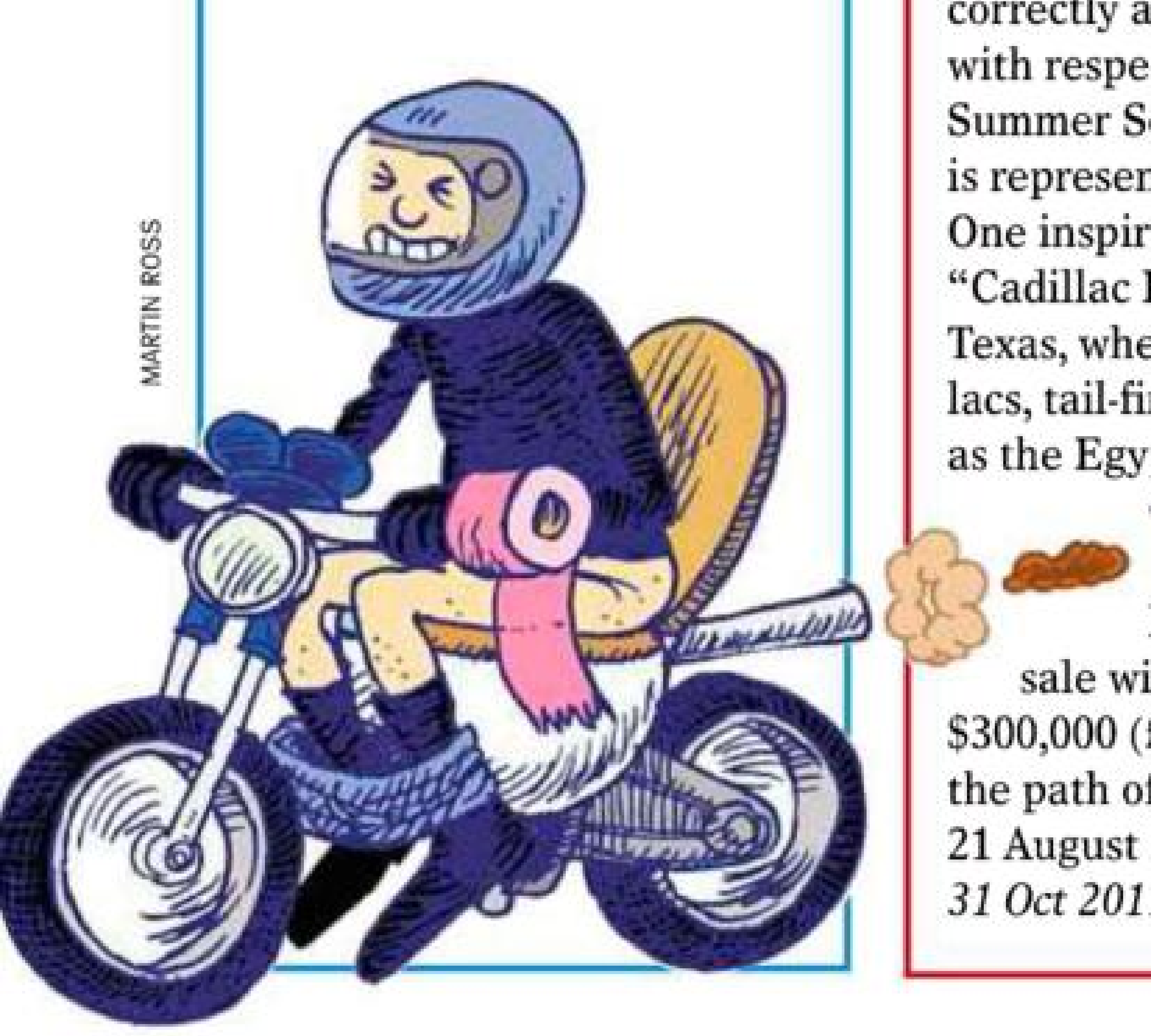
Bones in a lead coffin found buried under an old block of flats in Bicester, Oxfordshire, could belong to the town's patron, St Edburg – making it the first time the remains of a saint have been discovered in England. Edburg, the daughter of a pagan king, died in AD 650. Half her bones were taken abroad, but it is thought the rest stayed in Bicester. It could take up to a year to confirm the date of the bones. *D.Mirror, 13 Aug 2011.*

CANNIBAL GOLDFISH

Shaggy and Daphne, two of six goldfish abandoned during the February earthquake in New Zealand, were found alive after 134 days trapped in their 100-litre (22 gallon) tank without food or power for their filter. They were in offices of Quantum Chartered Accountants in downtown Christchurch, made off-limits after the quake. One fish was dead, but three others had disappeared, presumably eaten by the survivors (with a weed salad). *[AP] 28 July 2011.*

MOTION FROM MOTIONS

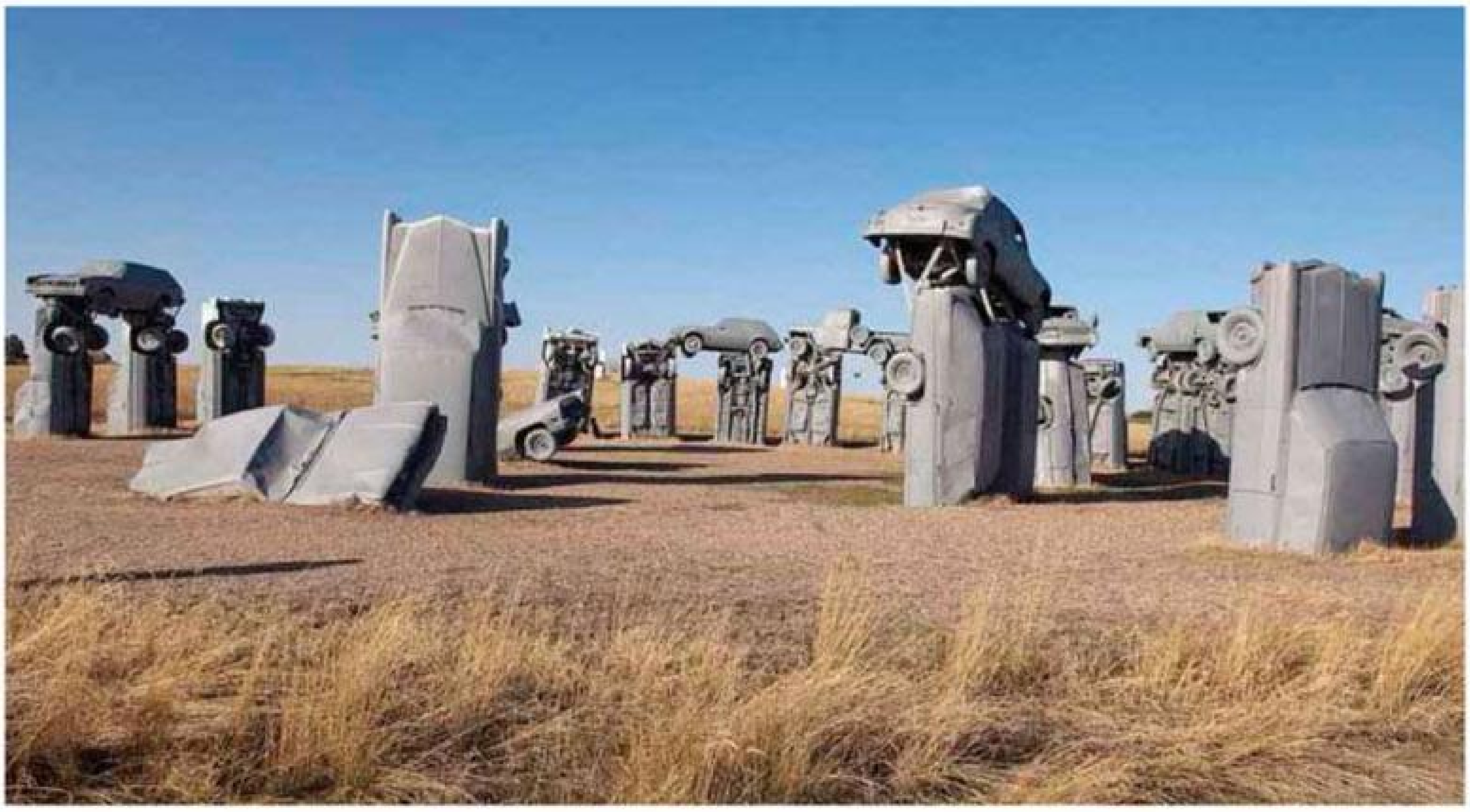
A motorbike has been kicking up a stink in Japan as it is powered entirely by the rider's fæces. The Toilet Bike Neo is made by lavatory firm Toto, which hopes it will help reduce CO_2 emissions by 50 per cent in six years. *Metro, 17 Oct 2011.*



MARTIN ROSS

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

STORIES PREVIOUSLY COVERED IN *FORTEAN TIMES*



ASSOCIATED PRESS / NATI HARNIK

CLONEHENGE FOR SALE [FT56:50–51]

In 1987 Jim Reinders, 61, a retired engineering consultant, built a replica of Stonehenge out of old cars, as a tribute to his late father, who farmed the site just outside Alliance, Nebraska. This circle of gas-guzzlers, painted battleship grey and planted boot-first into the prairie, attracts 100,000 visitors a year. It featured on the album sleeve of *Remastered: the Best of Steely Dan* (1993) and in the final scene of Dan Mirvish's 1994 film *Omaha*. A visitors' centre was built in 2006. The cars are arranged in the same positions as the Wiltshire megaliths and are correctly aligned for the latitude with respect to sunrise at the Summer Solstice. The heel stone is represented by a 1962 Cadillac. One inspiration for Reinders was "Cadillac Ranch" near Amerillo, Texas, where there are 12 Cadillacs, tail-fins up, at the same angle as the Egyptian pyramids. In October, Carhenge (also known as the "Car Art Reserve") was up for sale with an asking price of $300,000 (£192,000). It will be in the path of the Solar eclipse on 21 August 2017. *Metro, 25 Oct; [R] 31 Oct 2011.*

WEEPING STONES [FT192:22]

A seven-year-old Indian girl has been weeping stones. Tamil Nesan reported on 10 November that stones had been discharging from Kura Nitya's right eye for the past 15 days. Nitya, from a village near Hyderabad, had been weeping about 12 to 25 stones a day. Her parents had approached several ophthalmologists, who were unable to diagnose what was causing the problem. "Initially, we thought it was some divine power and prayed to God for this phenomenon to stop," said her grandfather, Gopal Reddy. Nitya said the lower portion of her right eye swelled minutes before the stones painlessly popped out. *Straits Times (Singapore), 16 Nov; TNT, 21 Nov 2011.*

In February 2004, doctors in Saudi Arabia were investigating the case of Mara, an eight-year-old girl who had been weeping stones for the previous month [**FT185:9**]. In October 2004, Savitri, a 15-year-old girl from the Indian state of Jharhand, had tiny stones emerging from the corners of her eyes. Before they emerged, she suffered excruciating pain in her head. Tiny stones also emerged from her ears, nose and mouth. Doctors were mystified [**FT192:22**]. In 1996, a 12-year-old Lebanese girl was apparently weeping shards of glass [**FT94:20**]; and in 2009 a 15-year-old boy from Tennessee was shedding tears of blood every day [**FT255:5**].

FOREST BOY [FT281:4–5]

Authorities in Berlin said they had received many appeals from people across the world who thought the "forest boy" could be a missing relative, but most of the reports had been ruled out. The 17-year-old, who says his name is Ray, turned up in Berlin on 5 September 2011, claiming to have lived in a forest with his father for five years after his mother had been killed in a car crash. He said that after his father died in a fall he buried him and walked north. On 7 October, an elderly Swiss couple contacted Berlin police to say that, after seeing the boy's photofit, they believed he was their missing grandson. They were keen to provide a DNA sample to be tested against that of the boy, but he initially refused to co-operate. He couldn't pinpoint the forest where he said he lived and was also unable to give his nationality, although police soon suspected he was not British. And after an examination of his clothes and tent revealed no sign that they had been used for very long in the open, they concluded he had never lived in the wild. On 25 November, he relented and gave a DNA sample. No news of a match at the time of going to press. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 8 Oct; Sunday Times, 9 Oct; D.Mirror, 26 Nov 2011.*

THE BLACK DEATH [FT281:9]

The genetic code of the germ that caused the Black Death has been mapped using bacteria from the East Smithfield mass burial site of 1348–49 near the Tower of London, according to an online report in the journal *Nature* on 12 October. The study – led by Johannes Krause of the University of Tübingen in Germany along with Hendrik Poinar and Kirsten Bos of McMaster University in Canada – sequenced about 99 per cent of the DNA from bacterial samples from the dental pulp of four individuals, using a new technique that can distinguish ancient genetic material from later contamination.

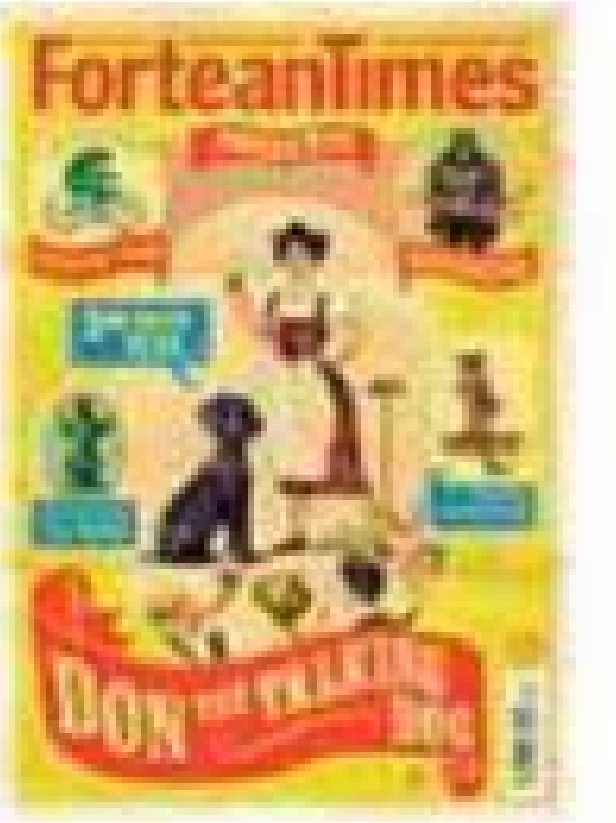
The pathogen's DNA suggests that it was so deadly because it was a new disease to which humans had little or no resistance. Its extreme virulence also appears to have driven rapid human evolution: many of the survivors were those with some resistance, and the development of an immune population would have rendered later outbreaks less deadly.

The Black Death came at the worst possible time: the climate was getting colder, Europe was engulfed in war and famine, and people were moving into closer quarters where the disease could infect them and spread easily.

The research indicates that the bacterium emerged no earlier than the 1280s, going on to become a direct ancestor of modern strains of *Yersinia pestis* that are almost identical to the Smithfield samples. This undermines theories that earlier pandemics, such as the Plague of Justinian, which killed 25 million or more after striking Constantinople in AD 541, were the same disease.

"The findings suggest that factors other than microbial genetics, such as environment, vector dynamics and host susceptibility, should be at the forefront of epidemiological discussions regarding *Y.pestis* infections," the researchers wrote. People still get the plague, usually from fleas from rodents or other animals, but not very often. There are around 2,000 cases a year worldwide, mostly in rural areas, with a handful of them popping up in remote parts of the United States. Earlier in 2011, two people in New Mexico were diagnosed with plague, which luckily is treatable with modern antibiotics. *[AP] 12 Oct; Times, Guardian, 13 Oct 2011.*

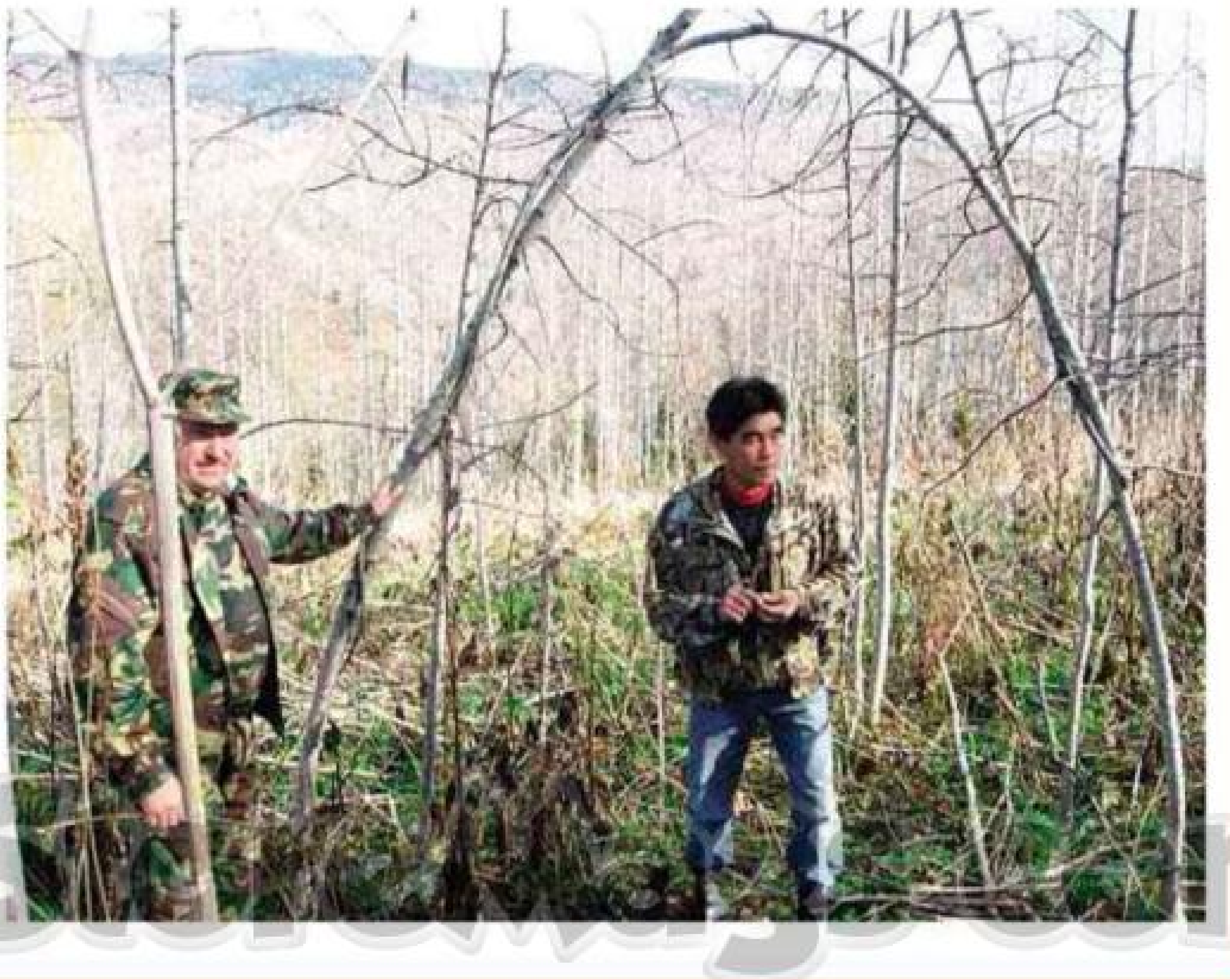
SIBERIAN WILDMAN HUNTS [FT282:9]



The twisting of trees to form arches in the Kemerovo region of Siberia (below) has been presented as further evidence for the existence of 'yeti' or wildmen, suggesting a creature building nests in the same way as gorillas or orangutans. "We didn't feel like the trees we saw in Siberia had been done by a man or another mammal," said biologist John Bindernagel, 69. "Twisted trees like this have also been observed in North America and they could fit with the theory that Bigfoot makes nests."

On 22 November, Yuri and Svetlana Kungushev announced that they had found a trail of giant footprints 800 yards (730m) long close to their mountain holiday home near Tashtagol. Casts of some of the prints, as long as a size 24 shoe, were sent along with 2in (5cm) strands of brown hair to Igor Burtsev, director of the International Centre of Hominology in Tashtagol, the main cheerleader for the local wildman.

Dr Jeff Meldrum, professor of anatomy and anthropology at Idaho State University, who took part in the September conference and field trip to the Azass cave, believes he was invited to give credibility to Burtsev's assertions. He said the twisted trees were conveniently located near the sites they visited, and he noticed saw-cuts. The cave was not remote but apparently visited rather frequently. The footprints and 'nest' inside the cave looked like a staged event. Only right foot impressions were found, Meldrum remarking that the creature appeared to be "playing hopscotch". The prints had uncharacteristic pressure ridges consistent with that made from a rigid wooden imprint. When someone commented that the "nest" hardly looked used, Burtsev jumped into it himself for a photo opportunity, oblivious of any potential evidence that might have been there. A hair sample was collected in the cave but not from the nest. *doubtfulnews.blog, 24 Oct; Sun, 14+23 Nov 2011.*



BARCROFT USA / JOHN BINDERNAGEL

SIDELINES...

EDIBLE RELICS

Michael and Francesca Bennett created the Museum of Celebrity Leftovers at their Old Boatstore beachside café in Kingsand, Cornwall. In July they were selling the café and museum. Items on offer (in airtight jars) included a chunk of bread pudding nibbled by the Prince of Wales (£300) and a crust from David Bailey's cheese sandwich (£100). *Sunday Telegraph, 10 July 2011.*

SERBIAN SCAM

A conman in Serbia stole 350 coffins worth £30,000 after pretending to be a council worker. He claimed he was in charge of moving bodies from a cemetery and got carpenter Pero Meric to make the caskets. "We wonder what on earth he is going to do with 350 coffins," said a police spokesman in Cacak. *Metro, 18 Aug 2011.*

GOING FOR BROKE

Stressed Americans are spending serious money to take out their rage on cars, pianos, computers, motorcycles, TVs, and pottery, with weapons of their choice: chainsaws, sledgehammers, battleaxes, etc. The members-only Destruction Company is based at a secret location in New Jersey. Members – 40 per cent of them women – don protective clothing. The smashing is filmed so members can watch themselves in action. *MX News, 15 June 2011.*

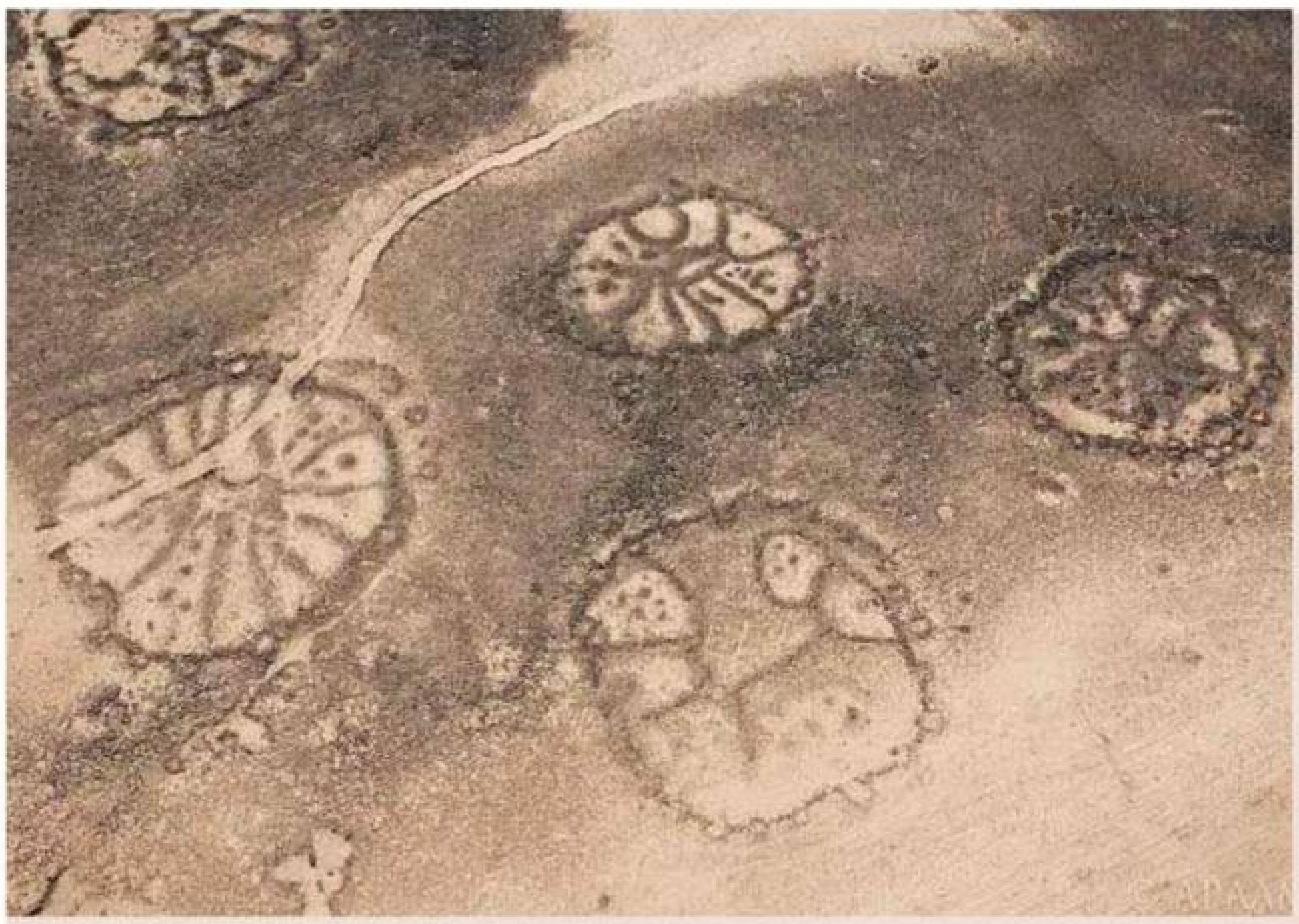
SLOUGH HORROR

A man thought he was the Devil when he gouged out his mother's eyes and raped her. The 23-year-old attacked her in November 2010 as she sat on a sofa, before running naked out of the family home in Slough, Berkshire, and launching himself at passing cars. Police found the 53-year-old mother covered in blood and permanently blinded. The son lay injured by the side of the road "mouthing strange words" and seeming possessed. *Metro, 16 Aug 2011.*

MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, a founding co-editor of the peer-review *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.bergpublishers.com).

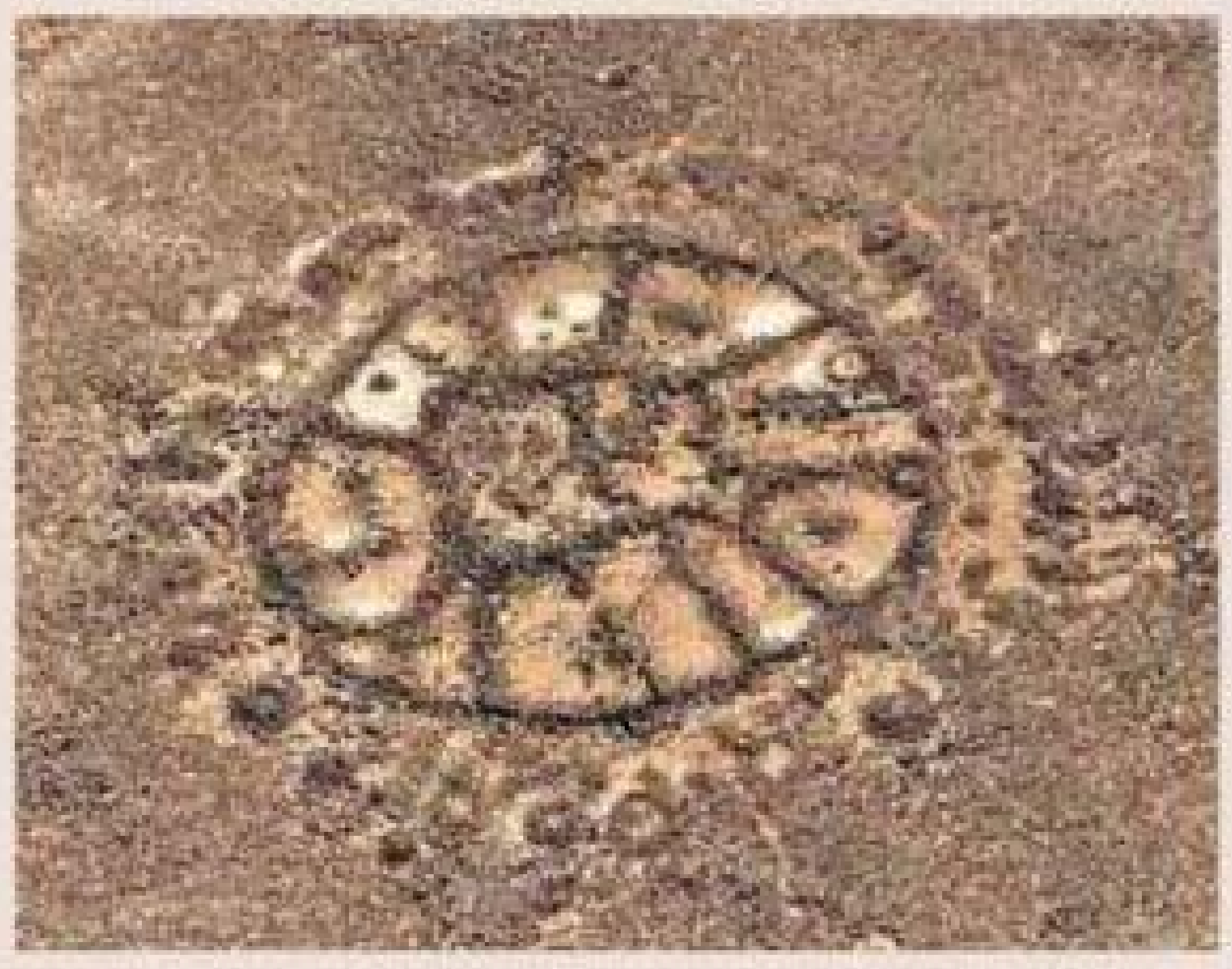


COURTESY DR DAVID KENNEDY / DAN BOYER / APAAME

MYSTERIES ON THE ARABIAN DESERT

Satellite photography has revealed vast numbers of strange stone desert features stretching from northern Syria through Jordan and Saudi Arabia to the Yemen. They occur on harrat (volcanic rock) regions of the Arabian Desert and have fringe archæologists in a lather of excitement and academic archæologists puzzled.

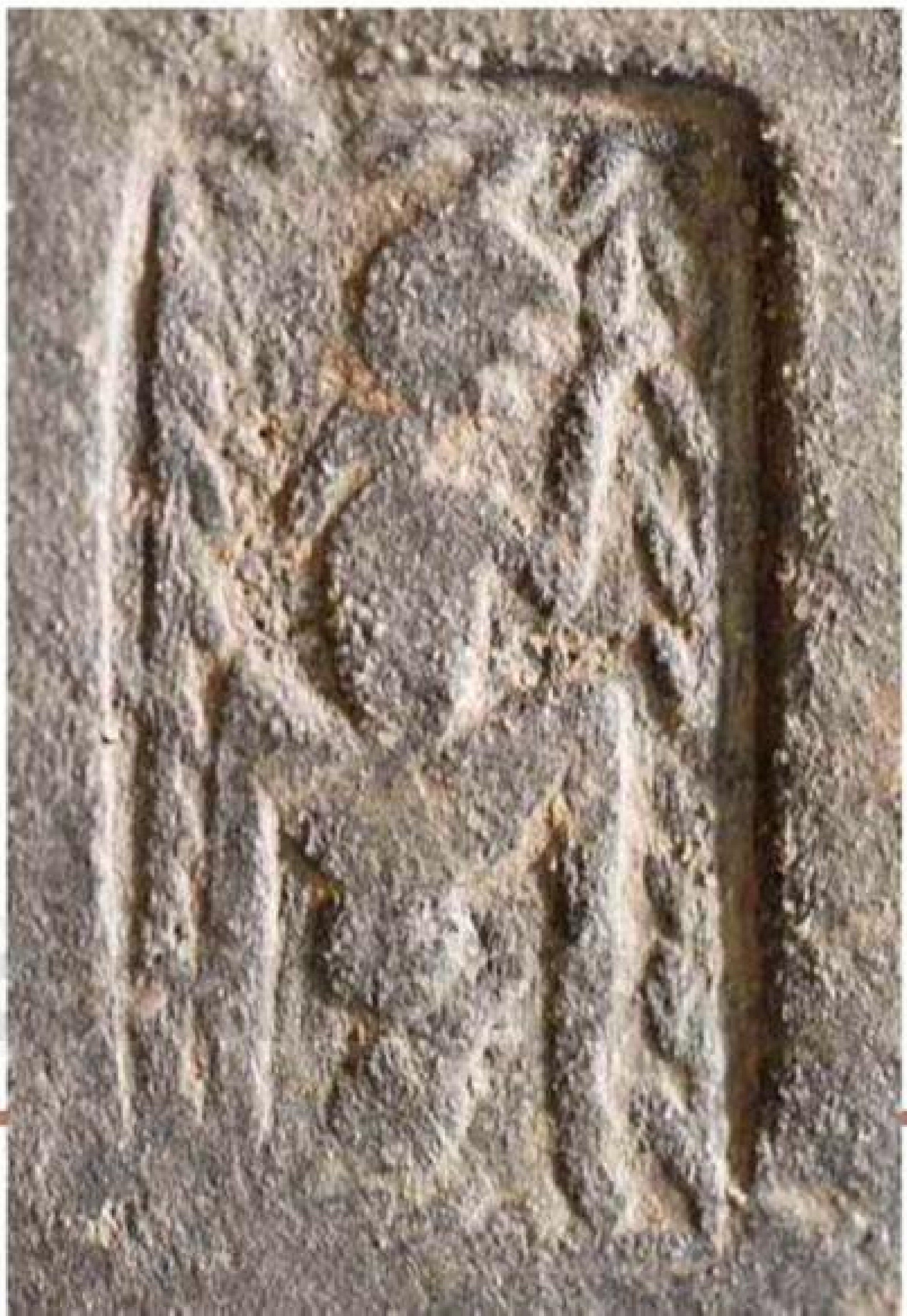
The features take the form of spoked wheels, meandering walls, geoglyph-like enclosures, as well as more obvious tombs. They span not only a vast territory but also an incredibly broad chronology, from the 7th millennium BC to early Roman times – they seem not to represent a single cultural effort. Until the advent of Google and Bing satellite imagery, plus a Jordanian aerial photography programme, they were virtually unknown, as not only are they in extremely remote areas but they can only be seen properly from above – indeed, as they are low drystone constructions made from relatively small rocks, they are almost indistinguishable from the surrounding terrain at ground level. They were noted briefly by a British airman in the 1920s, but hardly anything else has been said about them. The Bedouin refer to the features as the works of the "Old Men", by which they mean they are pre-Islamic.



Nobody yet knows what their various functions might have been. Some are burial cairns, and some of the larger, fancier stone outlines, referred to as "Kites", could be animal traps, though even this is speculation and doesn't really address all the aspects of the structures. "[Their] tails are so complex that it is hard to see how they could have functioned as traps," admits archæologist David Kennedy of the University of Western Australia in Perth. "And some walls run in a meandering fashion across the landscape, for kilometres in some cases." Over 100 gates have been counted in these walls, their purpose unknown. The "wheels" are also currently unexplained, and are not thought to be the remains of buildings. But these are early days yet, and little work has been done on the ground, exacerbated by the fact that archæologists are not used to working in these Arabian desert regions. *LiveScience.com, 14 Sept; USA Today, 24 Oct 2011.*

A TOUCHING FIND

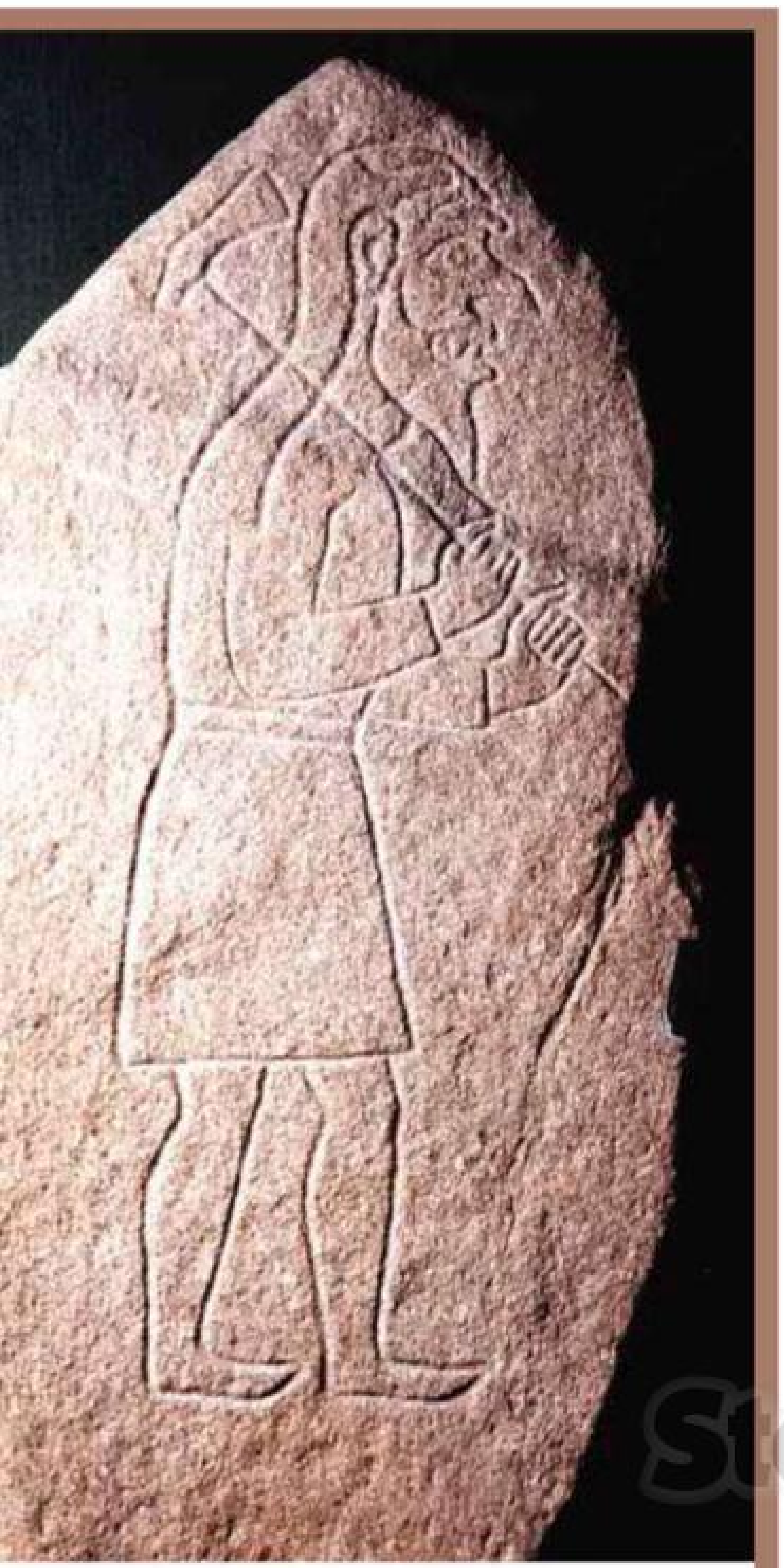
A piece of pottery at least 2,600 years old containing a relief image of a woman giving birth (right) has been found at Poggio Colla, an ancient Etruscan site near Florence in Italy. It is thought this could be the earliest Western image to show childbirth. Equally remarkable is that it was discovered during excavation by a blind archæologist, William Nutt of the University of Texas at Arlington. "I used dental tools and a sharpened trowel to slide along the ground," Nutt stated, describing his methodology. "I'd run my hands along the soil, feeling and uncovering different layers." *New Scientist, 24 Oct 2011.*



PHIL PERKINS / OPEN UNIVERSITY

PICTISH POWER BASE

The Picts were a proto-historic people in Scotland, spanning a period from the Iron Age to early mediæval times. They were never subjugated by the Romans, and left behind remarkable carved standing stones emblazoned with enigmatic symbols. Although a limited amount is known about later-period Picts, they still remain somewhat mysterious – their language has never been deciphered and it is not known how or why they disappeared. But now a little more about them has come to light: archæologists are uncovering evidence that the small Aberdeenshire village of Rhynie was a seat of "Royal" power during the Pictish era – a fortified early mediæval settlement has been uncovered close to the "Rhynie Man", a 6ft (1.8m) boulder with the rare carving of a Pict on it (Pictish stones usually have only symbols on them).



ABERDEENSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGY SERVICE

ABOVE: The "Rhynie Man" Pictish carving on a boulder in Aberdeenshire.

Dr Gordon Noble from Aberdeen University, who worked on the Rhynie dig along with archæologists from Chester University, considers the substantially fortified remains to be an "exceptional" discovery. Finds include pieces of glass, bronze pins with amber heads, and fragments from a large 5th-century Roman amphora (the first to be found anywhere in eastern Britain), indicating trade links with the Mediterranean area. "We believe it was a high status settlement. That kind of material has only ever turned up on royal or very high status sites elsewhere," said Noble. 'Arthurian' sites like Tintagel and Cadbury Castle (possibly the inspiration for Camelot) have yielded similar finds. *Scotsman, 23 Nov 2011.*

PRIDDY FOLLOW-UP

Further to our item on the damage to the Priddy Circles on the Mendip Hills of Somerset [**FT280:20**], we can report that a 72-year-old man has been arrested. *Avon & Somerset Police News, 31 Oct 2011.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

146: TAKE WITH A PINCH OF SALT

"There is a fictional coloration to everybody's account of an 'actual occurrence', and there is at least the lurk somewhere of what is called the 'actual' in everybody's yarn." – Fort, *Books*, p864.

"Bertrand Hallward, the man who almost certainly invented the myth that Scipio ploughed salt into the fields when he destroyed Carthage" – Mary Beard, *It's a Don's Life* (*Times* blog, 2 Dec 2008; pp140–1 in 2009 print version).

Fort, always tickled by academic goings-on (e.g. p670 on the alleged discovery of Livy's lost books: **FT135:24**), would have loved this example of what somebody (that great writer Anonymous, I think) remarked: "A fact is a statement repeated in two textbooks."

Hallward's claim appeared in the *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol8, 1930, p484, and at once began to be reproduced in his epigones' textbooks. As RT Ridley (*Classical Philology* 81, 1986, p140) put it: "so few words have rarely had such an influence".

The trouble is, there is not a single ancient authority for this statement. When up at Nottingham, I ventured to ask 'Bertie' Hallward for the source. He affected not to hear me, and in the 1950s it was not for a mere undergraduate to grill his august Vice-Chancellor.

In recent years, some historians have disavowed Hallward's assertion (see the register in my contribution to *Literature, Art, History: Studies on Classical Antiquity and Tradition*, ed. AF Basson & WJ Dominick, 2003, pp290–3). In the revised *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol8, 1989, p160, RV Harris tacitly dropped both salting and ploughing in favour of an anodyne "the city was cursed" – shades of Winston Smith 'correcting' malreported Big Brother speeches. However, they were back the very next year in N Bagnall's *The Punic Wars* (p320).

Sources or no sources, one wonders how much salt it would have taken, and whence would the ploughing Romans have acquired it? Possibly a mere handful was sprinkled (over their shoulders?) as a symbolic gesture. Or maybe there were convenient celestial saline falls, as reported elsewhere by Fort (pp69–70).

Vindication might still lurk in some Byzantine or mediæval quarter. After all, the claim that Tacitus was Titus's imperial librarian is unique to the Italian chronicler Gugliemo da Pastrengo (1290–1363). And the ploughing of Carthage is attested both by Modestinus in the legal *Digest* (bk7 ch4 para21) and Pope Boniface VIII's account (1299) of the destruction of Palestrina. This city was also salted, but Boniface adduces Carthage only for the ploughing.

I seem the first to observe that the story was kicking around elsewhere around this time by adducing Henry Miller's "Carthage before and after the salting" in *Tropic of Cancer* (1934). Although Miller knew more Greek and Latin than most would suppose (cf. my "The Colossus of Brooklyn: Henry Miller's Classics," *Classical & Modern Literature* 27.2, 2007, 103–126), it's a fair bet that newly minted copies of *CAH* were not hot topics among the artists and deadbeats of early 1930s Paris.

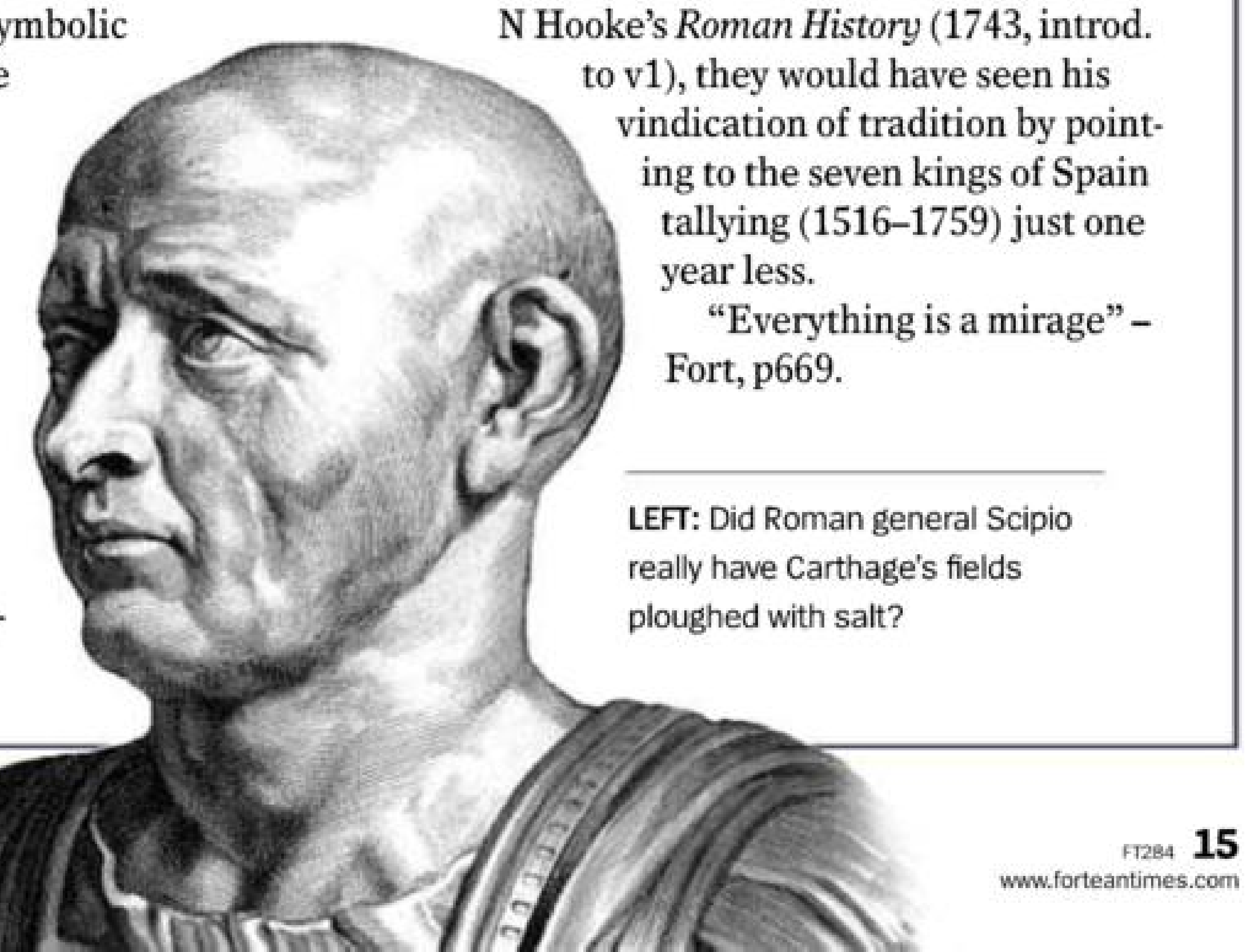
Various explanations have been canvassed. Salt-scattering was a Near Eastern ritual – Judges 9.45 is the *locus classicus*. The employment of Semitic procedure against Semitic foe would be piquant. Attila the Hun allegedly salted Padua (AD 452), Frederick Barbarossa Milan in 1162. The Romans widely used salt in rituals to propitiate the gods or avert evil omens (Horace, Ovid, Pliny, Plutarch, etc.). All possible influences on Hallward. Or, did he misremember Cicero's (*Brutus*, para128) "Scipio conquered everyone with salty wit," or Cato's (from Priscian, *Grammatici Latini*, vol3 p659) "the salt which grows at Carthage"?

France provides a possible for Hallward and a probable for Miller. Flaubert's Carthaginian novel *Salambô* (1862) describes deserted spots as "toutes blanches de sel", also the prophecy "la charrue retournera vos tombeaux". Miller came to Flaubert long before Julian Barnes. In 1905, an article ("Les villes africaines", *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol75, p660) by one L Bertrand describes Carthage as "semé du sel".

Others' saline drips may be read in *Classical Philology*, vols81&83, 1988.

This is a two-way 'scholarly' street. It is now textbook orthodoxy that Rome's seven kings are a Livian fiction because their aggregate reigns (244 years) are impossible. But if people did their own homework and consulted N Hooke's *Roman History* (1743, introd. to v1), they would have seen his vindication of tradition by pointing to the seven kings of Spain tallying (1516–1759) just one year less.

"Everything is a mirage" – Fort, p669.



GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

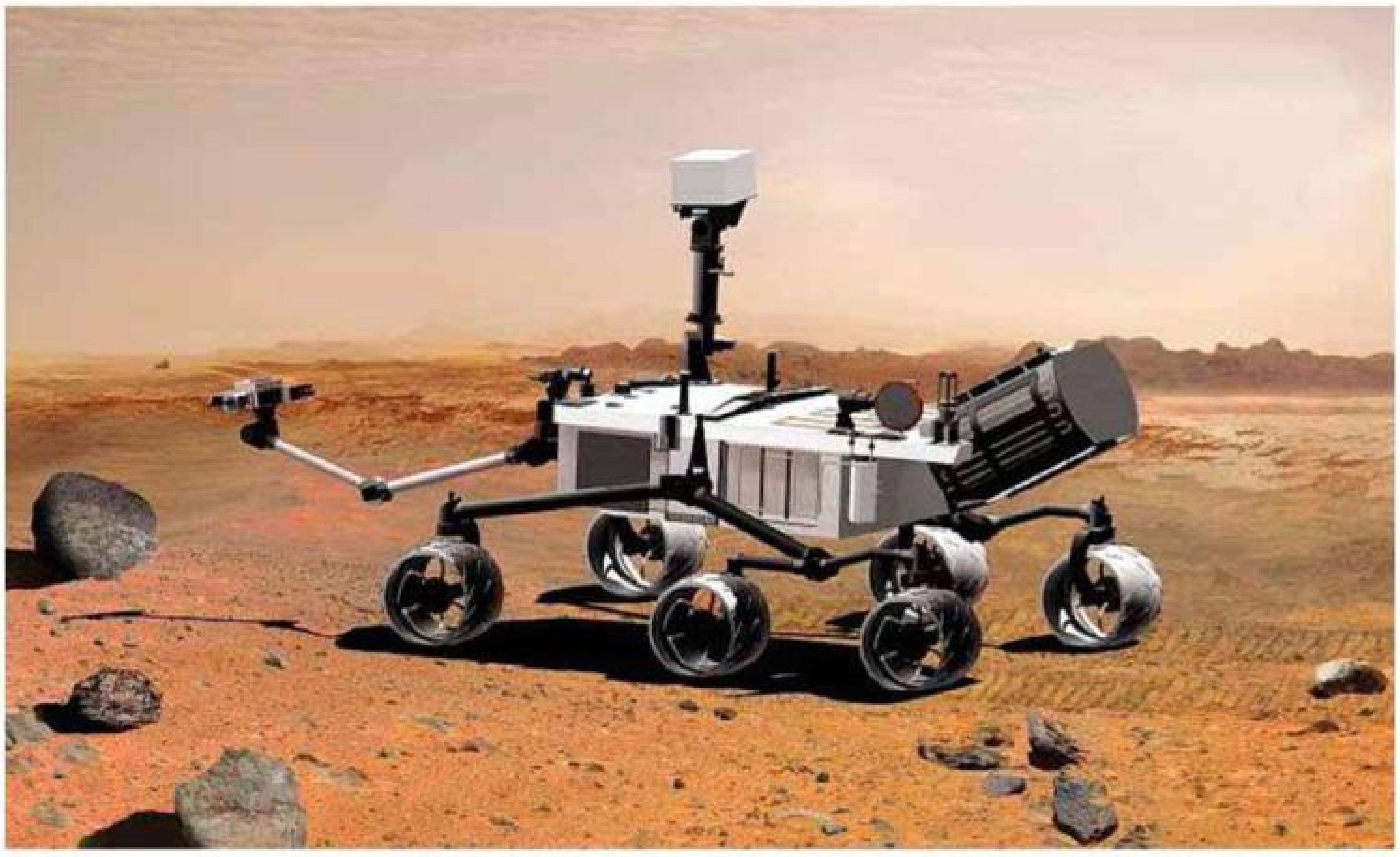
LEFT: Did Roman general Scipio really have Carthage's fields ploughed with salt?

MATT PATTINSON

SCIENCE

THE CURSE OF MARS

After all the successes in the history of space exploration, one planet has been plagued with crashes, failed launches and mysterious missing craft. **DAVID HAMBLING** reports.



NASA

Scientists don't believe in curses, evil spirits or supernatural beings. But the results of missions to Mars suggest a definite pattern, one that is more familiar in forteana than physics. Something is toying with us.

Mars research always seems to be two steps forward and one step back, with many missions ending in failure. In the 1960s and 70s, the Russians and Americans lost some 24 spacecraft on the way to the Red Planet. It's a long journey, taking several months even with the best possible trajectory, and in the early days of space exploration probes had limited autonomy and re-establishing radio contact was difficult.

NASA technicians started joking about a 'Great Galactic Ghoul' eating their probes in space; the term first cropped up in an interview with NASA scientist John Casani in 1964.[1] The Ghoul was sufficiently well known for NASA official Donna Shirley to mention it in a press statement in 1997, remarking: "The Great Galactic Ghoul had to get us somewhere and apparently the Ghoul has decided to pick on the [Mars] rover."[2]

Failures did not stop when technology improved, but have continued right up until the present day. On 8 November 2011, the Russians launched a probe called *Phobos-Grunt*. Phobos is one of Mars's moons and Grunt is Russian for soil; the probe should have travelled to Phobos, retrieved 200g (7oz) of soil and brought it safely back to Earth, but although *Phobos-Grunt* successfully reached Earth orbit, things soon started to go wrong. The rocket stage that should have sent it on course for Mars did not fire. The craft is operating autonomously, and ground controllers have not been able to make contact to find out why. The best guess is that a navigational problem has prevented it from orienting correctly.

At the time of writing, Russian scientists believe there is still a slim chance of gaining control of the craft and launching it on its way, but it's more likely that *Phobos-Grunt*'s orbit will decay and it will plunge to Earth early in 2012, scoring another success for the Ghoul.

"Mars really is the Bermuda Triangle of the Solar System," commented NASA's Colleen Hartman.[3] One assumes that she was using this as a figure of speech, and that NASA doesn't have any particular knowledge about ship-devouring rifts in the fabric of space-time just off Florida.

Shortly afterwards, NASA successfully launched its own Mars Science Laboratory mission. This includes a rover called *Curiosity* (pictured above), and should reach the Red Planet in August. The ambitious landing plan requires the one-ton *Curiosity* to be gently deposited on the Martian surface using a combination of parachutes, braking rockets and 'sky crane' winches – a tempting target for a gremlin.

NASA staff joked about a 'Great Galactic Ghoul' eating their probes

The Mars Science laboratory cannot detect living things directly – "Let me emphasise that we are not a life-detection mission," stated a NASA spokesman. It will collect samples and check for organic compounds and other signs that life might have been present once. The results may fall foul of the sort of confounding factors that have bedevilled previous missions. The *Viking* lander that reached Mars in 1976 carried out a series of soil chemistry experiments to show whether life was present. The results were confusing: no organic compounds were found, but something in the soil was producing carbon dioxide, supposedly an indication of life. It is now assumed that a chemical process was responsible for the CO_2, but later researchers have suggested that the testing mechanism could not have detected small quantities of organic material. In spite of the careful design of the experiments, the Viking results remain frustratingly inconclusive.

It's not just probes to Mars that are affected. In 2002, NASA scientists hailed meteorite ALH84001 as showing that life had existed once on Mars. This was because of tiny magnetite crystals that on Earth are always associated with fossilised bacteria. Later scientists suggested other geological possibilities for the crystals. The latest (2009) study says ALH84001 contains "strong evidence" of Martian life, but again, a final answer remains elusive.

This teasing pattern, where proof of an amazing phenomenon keeps slipping away, is familiar to forteans. Whether it's the study of UFOs, Bigfoot or psychic phenomena, conclusive proof is always within reach before evaporating. This pattern is reminiscent of the dealings with tricky and unreliable supernatural beings, like fairies and leprechauns, whose gift of gold turns into leaves the next morning. The pattern is identified with a universal mythological figure known as the Trickster – Hermes in Greek mythology, Loki in Scandinavian, Coyote in the southwestern US – who delights in confusing and confounding mortals.

NASA scientists looking for life on Mars may feel they are a world away from cryptozoologists or ufologists, but over the last 40 years they all seem to have been subject to the same sort of tricks. Gremlins joyride probes, and their carefully gathered golden data becomes worthless overnight.

Scientists are a persistent lot, but the quest for life on Mars may never be over. In centuries' time when there are research bases or colonies on Mars, people may still argue whether rock formations are fossils, ancient buildings, or geological quirks. If bacteria are found, there will be doubt over whether they might have been brought from Earth, perhaps even by one of the early probes looking for life… the Trickster can still get the last laugh.

NOTES

[1] http://1.usa.gov/utDA0m (nasa.gov).

[2] http://bit.ly/voJ2UH (edition.cnn.com).

[3] http://tgr.ph/toiASD (telegraph.co.uk).

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MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

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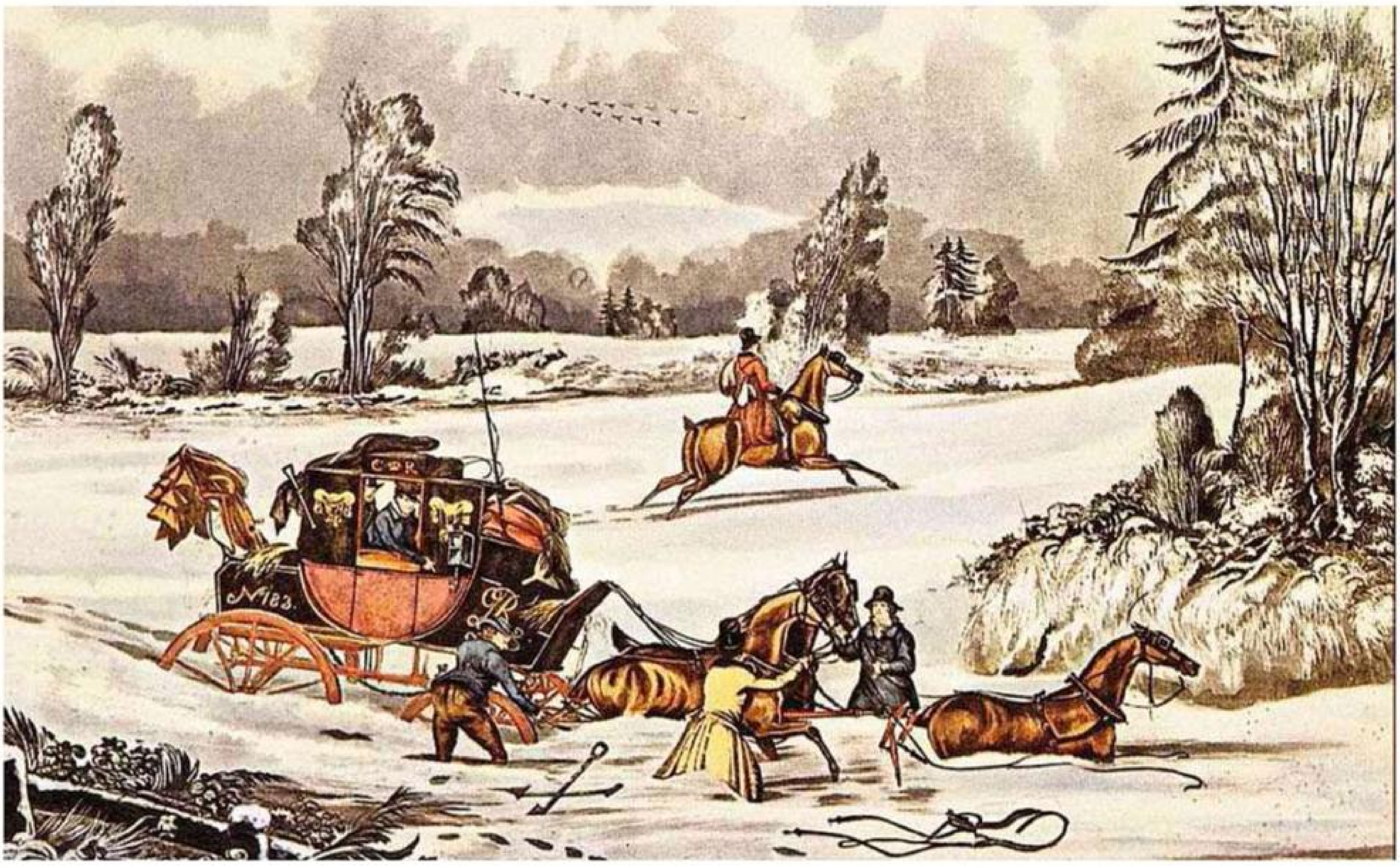
ALAN MURDIE concludes his round-up of phantom houses with a seasonably snowy tale.



One of the most common motifs in ghost folklore is the story of a visitor who goes to an unfamiliar place and encounters what s/he thinks is a living person. At the time, the visitor may be puzzled by aspects of the experience, but it is only later, on returning to the same location weeks, months or even years afterwards, that it is realised that the person encountered must have been a ghost.

A classic example is the story of two gentlemen travelling together in a post chaise one Christmas Eve, sometime between 1820 and 1830. The country was not known to them, and the difficulty of finding their way was increased by a heavy snowfall. The coachman took a wrong turning at some crossroads and only discovered his mistake when they arrived at a house whose brilliantly lit-up interior revealed a Christmas party in full swing. The elder of the two gentlemen walked up to the door, and asked directions from the master of the house, who came out to meet him. The gentleman was invited to enter, but on him declining, a male servant was sent out to provide directions to help the coachman to find the right road. As they were about to set off, one of the gentlemen gave the servant a half-crown tip. But as he placed the coin in the servant's hand, it appeared to fall through the hand into the snow, and the man mysteriously vanished.

The house was pulled down after a terrible crime on Christmas Eve

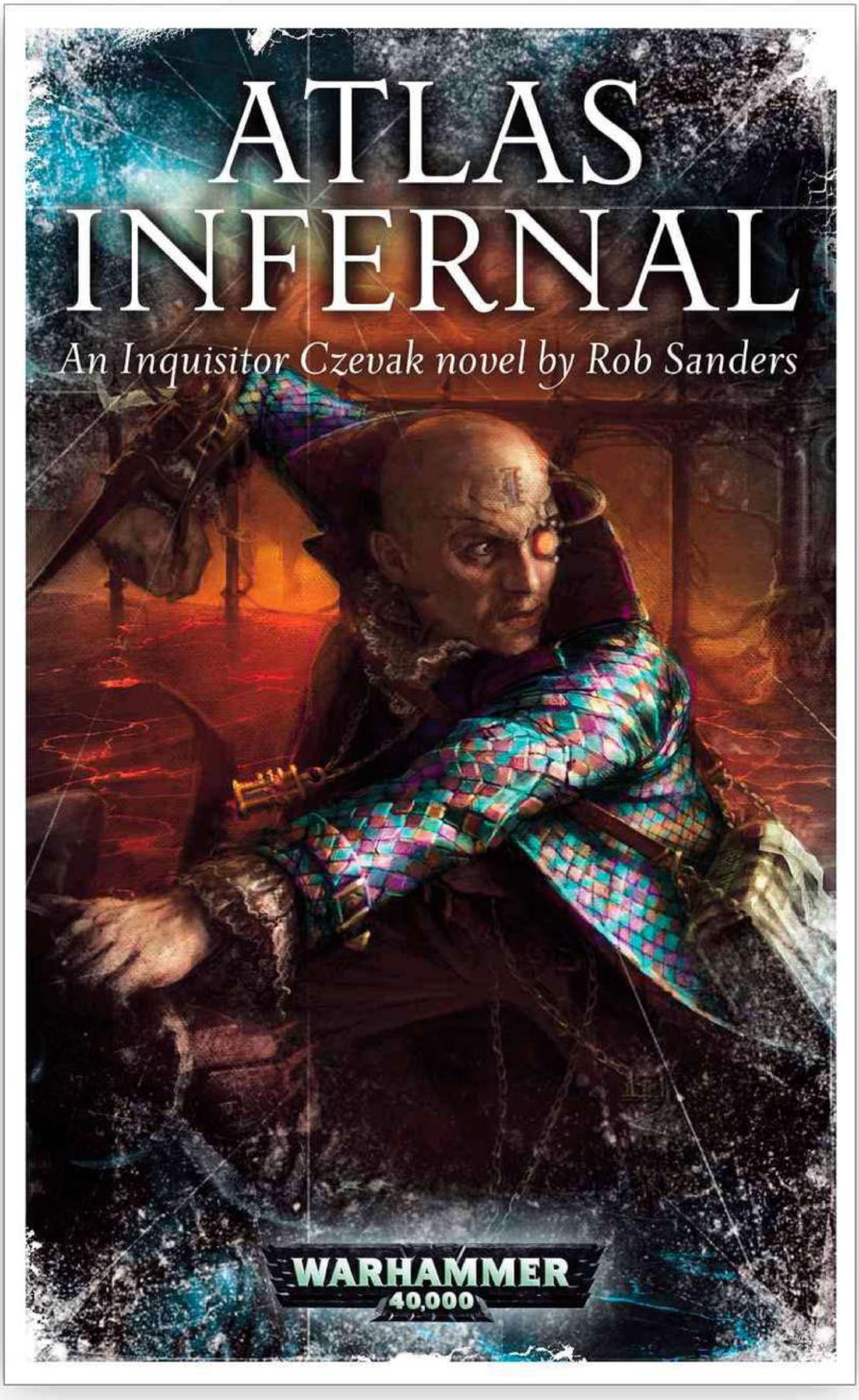
On reaching their destination, the travellers learnt that no such house now stood in the locality, but that a house such as they described had formerly occupied the spot. However, it had been pulled down after a terrible crime committed there on Christmas Eve many years before. On returning to the scene of their nocturnal adventure the next day, the travellers found in the snow the wheel marks of their carriage leading up to the spot where this house had once stood. In 1882, members of the newly formed Society for Psychical Research heard versions of the story and actually succeeding in tracing the surviving traveller. He confirmed most of the story in a letter, but there were some crucial differences. It transpired that it was not until many years afterwards that the travellers – who were schoolboys at the time of the occurrence – learned that no house had stood for more than half a century on the spot where they believed themselves to have gone astray. Regarding the giving of the tip to the spectral servant, the writer had the following to say:

"If I am right in my recollection, I think my friend made the remark to me, 'Didn't you see the coin go right through his hand and fall to the ground?' But, then, you must bear in mind that it was snowing heavily, and a flake of snow might be taken for a half crown, or he *might* have said it in joke. Then, as to the unusually rapid disappearance of the man. This *may be accounted for* by the density of the falling snow, or his temporary concealment behind a bush or tree. Strange as the whole affair appeared to my vision that night, I am not inclined to lay much stress upon these deceptive phantoms." Later in the same letter, he stated that he viewed the event as "a strange circumstance, some portions of which were really puzzling to me when I came to think them over in after times."

As a result, the Society excluded the account from its *Proceedings*; further grounds for doubting such a story might include the improbability of ever finding the same coach tracks the next day given that it was snowing, the unlikelihood of retracing steps on Christmas day and, as it transpired, even of two boys travelling around in a post chaise unescorted in mid-winter. Folklorists are also apt to doubt the authenticity of such stories, seeing them as modern variants of older legends and folktales, although they are often being repeated today in varying degrees of detail. For example, in a later version of the story – set at Cold Ashton in Gloucestershire in the 1930s, involving a painter named Olive Snell – the tip is handed to the servant on the doorstep and when the traveller returns, the coin is found lying outside the front entrance to a derelict mansion.

Sources: "First Report of the Committee on Haunted Houses" in *Proceedings of the SPR* vol.1, 1882–83, 103–105; Eric Russell: *Ghosts* (1970); Anthony Hippisley Coxe: *Haunted Britain* (1973); Jacqueline Simpson & Jennifer Westwood: *The Lore of the Land* (2006).

Everything you have been told is a lie…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ABOVE: Gabi Jones enjoys her food. She enjoys it so very much that her fetish website attracts browsers desperate to see the affect it has on her.

STRANGE URGES

- A man known in Arkansas as the 'Toe Suck Fairy' for a series of 1990s assaults on women's feet was arrested after he struck again more than a decade later. Michael Robert Wyatt, 50, was arrested on 26 September after two women identified him from a photo line-up as "the man who approached them in local stores [in Conway, Arkansas], commenting on their feet and asking to suck their toes". A third woman told the police a man approached her while she was sitting outside her apartment and put her toes in his mouth. *Queensland Sunday Mail, 18 Sept; Irish Independent, 29 Sept 2011.*

- Between February and August, nine women fell victim to a buttock slasher in Fairfax County, Virginia, shopping malls. The assailant cut through their clothes with either a razor or boxcutter, leaving bleeding gashes. None of the victims – all in their late teens or early 20s – suffered serious injuries. Getting sexual satisfaction from stabbing or cutting is labelled "piquerism". In September, the assailant was named as Johnny Guillen Pimentel, 40, but the police were unable to find him. *[AP] 30 July; Washington Post, 10 Aug; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 19 Sept 2011.*

Gabi Jones first noticed as she tucked into a tub of ice cream

- Martin Soto, 43, was arrested in Chandler, Arizona, on 14 October on suspicion of assault after he allegedly licked a woman's knee when she fell down a step. Soto then reportedly tried to hug her and lick her face, but she pushed him away, got in her car and called police. *Arizona Republic, 17 Oct 2011.*

- Toshihiko Mizuno, 55, an unemployed Japanese man, was arrested in Tokyo on 13 June for persuading three schoolgirls to spit for him. He separately approached the girls, aged nine and 10, in October and December 2010, saying: "I am doing research on saliva. Give me your saliva." A police spokesman said: "He videotaped them as they spat. He also asked them to open their mouths and filmed their mouth interiors and tongues. He did so to satisfy his sexual desire." According to the police, Mizuno had approached about 4,000 young girls and managed to collect saliva from about 500 of them over 17 years in Tokyo and neighbouring Saitama. They found 26 videotapes in his home showing more than 200 girls. *[AFP] 14 June 2011.*

- Christopher Attwood, 24, was jailed for 16 weeks on 18 August for following "petite and pretty" girls and throwing jugfuls of water or cola over them. There had been 12 reported incidents in Gloucester since April, and Attwood owned up to nine of them. His victims were left terrified and traumatised, fearing that he might have poured far more sinister liquids over them. *Western Mail, 29 June; Western Daily Press, 19 Aug; Sunday Mercury, 21 Aug 2011.*

- Edwin Charles Tobergta III, 32, was arrested in Hamilton, Ohio, on 28 August for engaging in "sexual activity" with a pink inflatable swimming pool raft in an alley. The police were called after the owner of the raft spotted Tobergta running off with his pool accessory. "The witness stated the defendant appeared to be having sex with the raft due to the fact that his pants were down around his ankles," according to the police report. Tobergta – who had been arrested at least five times for similar offences since 1999 – asked for help. In October 2002, a Hamilton woman reported him for having sexual relations with an inflated, illuminated 4ft (1.2m)-tall plastic pumpkin she kept on her porch as a Hallowe'en decoration. "He has a lot of mental problems and he's always had a fascination for plastic," said his grandmother, Linda Tobergta. "That's just it. That's all of it. We never could get the proper care for Edwin. It's like nobody cares." *NY Daily News, 31 Aug 2011.*

- When Gabi Jones, 25, eats to excess, she has an orgasm. In the last five years she has ballooned in weight from 20 stone (127kg) to 35 stone (222kg) after eating enough ice cream, cakes and pizzas to reach the pinnacle of sexual ecstasy. She suffers from persistent genital arousal syndrome, where orgasms are triggered without direct sexual stimulation. In extreme cases, sufferers of the condition experience 300 orgasms a day. Miss Jones, from Colorado, first noticed something unusual was happening as she tucked into a tub of ice cream. "My friends thought I was making it up," she said. "I was stunned but in no doubt of what had happened." She decided to profit from her affliction by setting up a fetish website where punters pay to watch her scoff herself to orgasm. *Metro, 11 Feb 2011.*

• On the afternoon of 1 May 2011, a 53-year-old visually impaired man from Sonoma, California, was standing in his apartment when a woman appeared in his doorway unannounced and told him she was there to give him an enema. Because the man had recently undergone intestinal surgery, he thought perhaps that explained her presence. The woman deftly guided him to his bedroom, had him undress and lie face down on his bed. She then gave the man an enema and promptly left. The whole episode took about a minute-and-a-half. The woman didn't leave a card or any form of ID, and given the condition of his eyesight, the man did not, in the complete sense of the word, actually see her.

The next day, he began wondering about what had happened to him but took no action. The day after that, he contacted police. The man's doctor said no enema had been prescribed, ordered or approved, and the puzzling episode remains unexplained. Fatal enemas have been implicated in conspiracy theories surrounding the deaths of both Napoleon and Marilyn Monroe, but the victim of what may become known in crime annals as "The Sonoma Enema" apparently suffered no ill-effects. *sonomanews.com, 9 May 2011.*

We recall Michael Hubert Kenyon, known as the "Illinois Enema Bandit", who between 1965 and 1975 forcibly administered enemas to at least two dozen victims, mostly female students. He served six years in prison and was paroled in 1981. Frank Zappa immortalised him with a song called "The Illinois Enema Bandit", first released on *Zappa in New York* (1978). See Archive Gem #9, **FT79:7**.

WAKING UP GAY

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Chris Birch, 26, a rugby player from Ystrad Mynach, South Wales, spent his weekends watching sport and drinking with his mates. When he attempted a back flip in front of friends, he fell down a grass bank, breaking his neck and suffering a stroke. Regaining consciousness in hospital a few days later, he found he was homosexual. "I was gay when I woke up and I still am," he said. "It sounds strange but when I came round I immediately felt different. I wasn't interested in women any more. I had never been attracted to a man before – I'd never even had any gay friends. But I didn't care about who I was before. I had to be true to my feelings. Suddenly, I hated everything about my old life. I didn't get on with my friends. I hated sport and found my job [in a bank] boring. I started to take more pride in my appearance, bleached my hair and started working out. I went from a 19-stone [120kg] skinhead to an 11-stone [70kg] preened man." He broke up with his fiancée, retrained as a hairdresser, and now lives with his boyfriend Jack Powell, 19, above the hair salon where he works. "I think I am happier than ever," he said. "I am even more confident. I'm nothing like the old Chris now, but I wouldn't change a thing."

Strokes can sometimes open up, or activate, a previously dormant part of the brain. For instance, Alan Brown from Malvern, Worcestershire, woke from a stroke in 2009 to find he was able to paint and draw in incredible detail, despite having no previous artistic skill. *D.Mail, Metro, 9 Nov 2011.*

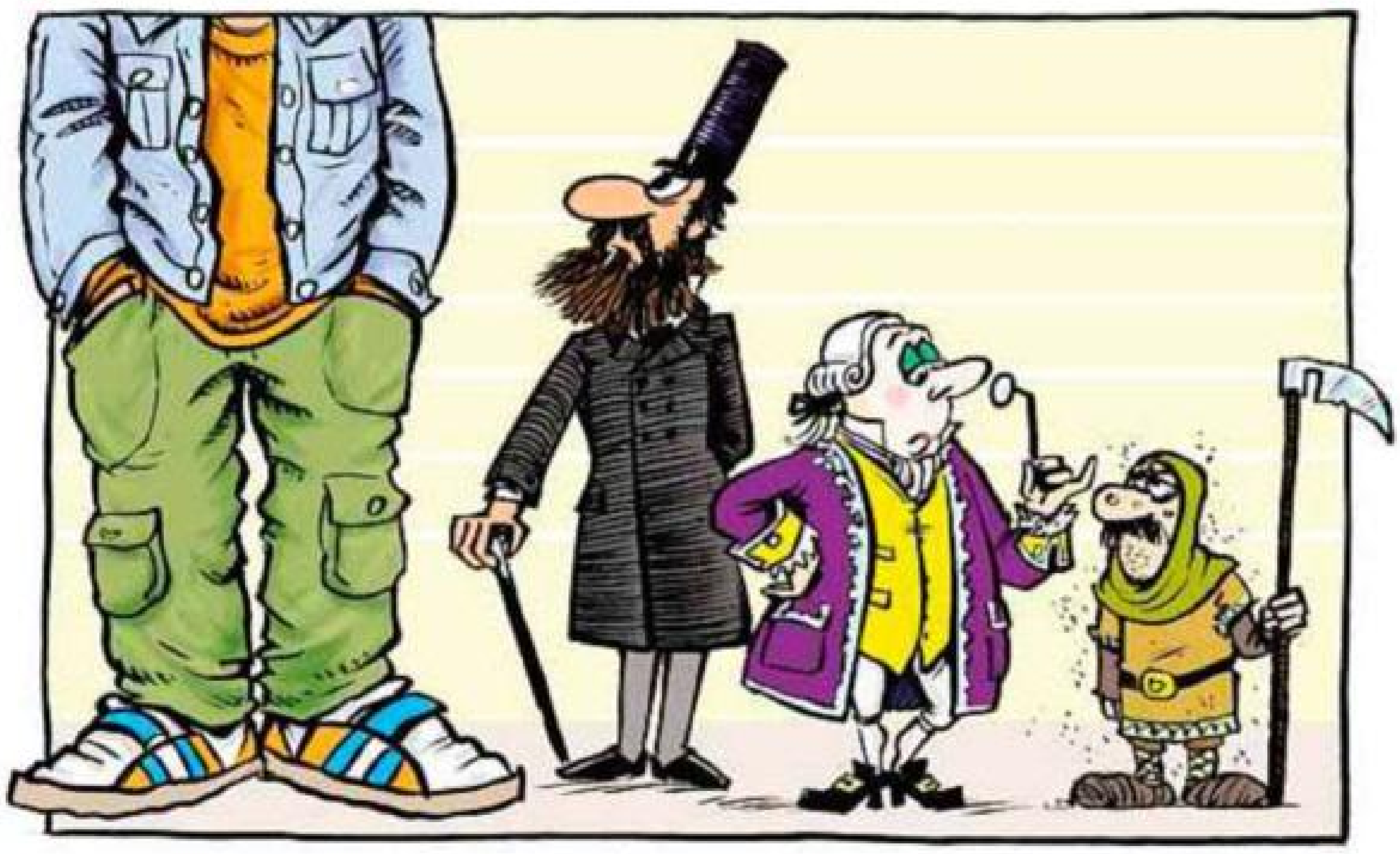
Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

150. OUR TITCHY ANCESTORS

The myth

People were much smaller in the old days.



The "truth"

I can't remember when I last met a teenager who wasn't taller than his or her parents, which makes the persistence of this modern myth easy to understand. But the two things all informed sources seem to agree on are that average height rises *and falls* over the centuries – and that it doesn't rise or fall all that much. Figures abound, based on the excavations of dated skeletons; the "average mediæval man" in Britain was 1.71m (5ft 7.3in) tall; a mere 4cm/1.6in (in some reports, 2cm/0.8in) shorter than a modern Briton. Saxon Londoners were "similar in height" to today's, but Roman Londoners were "6cm [2.4in] shorter". Our hunter-gatherer ancestors, some claim, were taller than we are. Some experts argue that average height in Britain fell in the 19th (some say 18th) century, as the industrial revolution impoverished millions, leading to poor diets, long working hours, child labour, and other height-suppressant factors. Early health and safety legislation, and better nutrition following the repeal of the Corn Laws, then saw the average go up again; in other words, the rise of trade unionism leads to the rising of the race. But this is by no means universally accepted.

Sources

http://bit.ly/set5cZ (museumoflondon.org.uk); http://bit.ly/vdFDwD (museumoflondon.org.uk); http://econ.st/e3NMyz (economist.com); http://bit.ly/sAj4xR (coht.org).

Disclaimer

I'm no expert, but I wonder – how significant are the sample sizes? And, since differences in average height seem to be largely determined by social class, how statistically valid are studies based on remains if the status of the deceased is unknown? If you can add anything to this debate, other than tall stories, please write to the letters page.

Update

NOW THEN NOW THEN

In **FT204:21**, we asked about famous people being buried upright. According to press reports on 14 November 2011, British broadcaster Jimmy Savile (1926–2011) is buried in Scarborough at a 45-degree angle, so he can "enjoy the sea view".

FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

ALL FALL DOWN

More mass faintings reported from around the world

REUTERS / PRING SAMRANG

- On 30 August 2010, more than 100 workers were evacuated from the Wella factory in an industrial park outside Cape Town, South Africa. The problem was thought to be a gas leak – but none was identified, at least as far as we can tell from news reports. Thirty-five people were hospitalised, while 50 members of the public were treated for nausea, shortness of breath and "stinging eyes" – typical symptoms of mass psychogenic illness (what used to be called "mass hysteria"). The next day, when officials from the South African Department of Labour arrived to investigate, they were called to an adjacent clothing factory, Intimate Apparel, after some workers said that their skin was burning and others collapsed. Some complained of headache, shortness of breath, dizziness and nausea. All the workers were sent home. "When we arrived, the face of one of our inspectors started burning," said a Department of Labour official. "Only some people were affected. We are conducting tests to establish what chemical is responsible for this." No further news emerged. *Times (Johannesburg), 1 Sept 2010.*

- At least 16 people became dizzy or sick during a church service at the Roman Catholic church of St Cyril of Jerusalem in Warwick, Pennsylvania, on 2 January 2011. Victims included six churchgoers, two police officers, two emergency workers and six firefighters. The first three parishioners to fall ill were seated in different parts of the church. Bloodwork, mechanical inspections and several air tests failed to identify the cause. Two later masses were celebrated outdoors. *Philadelphia (PA) Inquirer, 3 Jan 2011.*

- Between 17 January and 17 February 2011, students from Son Thanh Secondary and High School in the south-central Vietnamese province of Phu Yen suffered inexplicable bouts of fainting spells, breathing difficulties, fatigue and convulsions. Between 12 and 40 students were fainting every day, mainly between 1pm and 3pm, often preceded by fits of screaming. The students' parents said their children didn't manifest any of the symptoms while at home. Dr Nguyen Hung, director of Phu Yen's Preventive Health Centre, said the students recovered after massages, adding that they appeared to be suffering from "a psychological disorder". He said there had been similar outbreaks in other Vietnamese schools, for example in the central cities of Hue and Da Nang, though these were on a smaller scale than the Phu Yen outbreak. *Thanh Nien News, 18 Feb 2011.*

- About 800 employees of two factories in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, manufacturing footwear for the German company Puma AG, fainted over the weekend of 9/10 April. Workers suddenly fell ill on Saturday night and again on Sunday morning at Universal Apparel (Cambodia) Co. Ltd, and Huey Chuen Corp (Cambodia) Ltd. Another Phnom Penh factory was affected on 15 June. Staff at King Fashion Garment blamed 'poisoned' drinking water, intense heat and chemical odours. There was another fainting outbreak at one of the Puma factories at the end of July. Union leaders said garment workers were cutting back on food and working longer hours to make ends meet. Kampong Chhnang Provincial Hospital director Sou Rin Ravuthy said doctors believed the women fainted from a variety of factors: fatigue, insufficient food and shock from seeing colleagues drop unconscious. He said some workers recovered quickly and left for home after receiving serum and medicine. "We checked their blood pressure and oxygen, and they were normal," he said. "It was not caused by a bad factory environment or chemical sprays." Noun Chhenghour said it was the fourth time workers had fainted in the factory, and that about 100 workers had fainted on the same date last year.

- There were a further four mass fainting episodes in Cambodian garment factories in August 2011. Nothing abnormal was found at Zhen Tai Garment's factory in Phnom Penh. The third outbreak was on 23 August, this time at M&V factory in the provincial capital of Kampong Chhnang, which supplies knitwear for the Swedish company H&M. Starting around 9am, one or two women fainted, after which others followed suit. More than 100 workers collapsed, 80 of whom were hospitalised. Company representative Un Chhan Teak said the fainting was a result of shock and was not connected to working conditions. Two days later at the same factory, two workers collapsed at about 8.30am, triggering a further 196 to follow suit and be taken to hospital, including some who had fainted the first time around. Investigations by the government and the ILO (International Labour Organisation) had "not found any plausible causes" for the faintings. *Morning Star, 12 April; Metro, 17 June 2010. Phnom Penh Post (Cambodia), 24+26 Aug 2011.*

- A further mass fainting took place in October, again at a factory producing clothing for the Swedish fashion brand H&M. This time, 236 workers were affected by dizziness, headaches and vomiting at Anful Garments Factory (Cambodia) in Kompong Speu province. A spokesman said chemicals had been used to stop cockroaches eating the produce. It was said to be the third such event in a year at companies supplying H&M, causing concern and the promise of an investigation by the firm. *[R] 27 Oct 2011. For recent apparent mass psychogenic illness in Afghanistan, see* **FT266:24, 268:23.**

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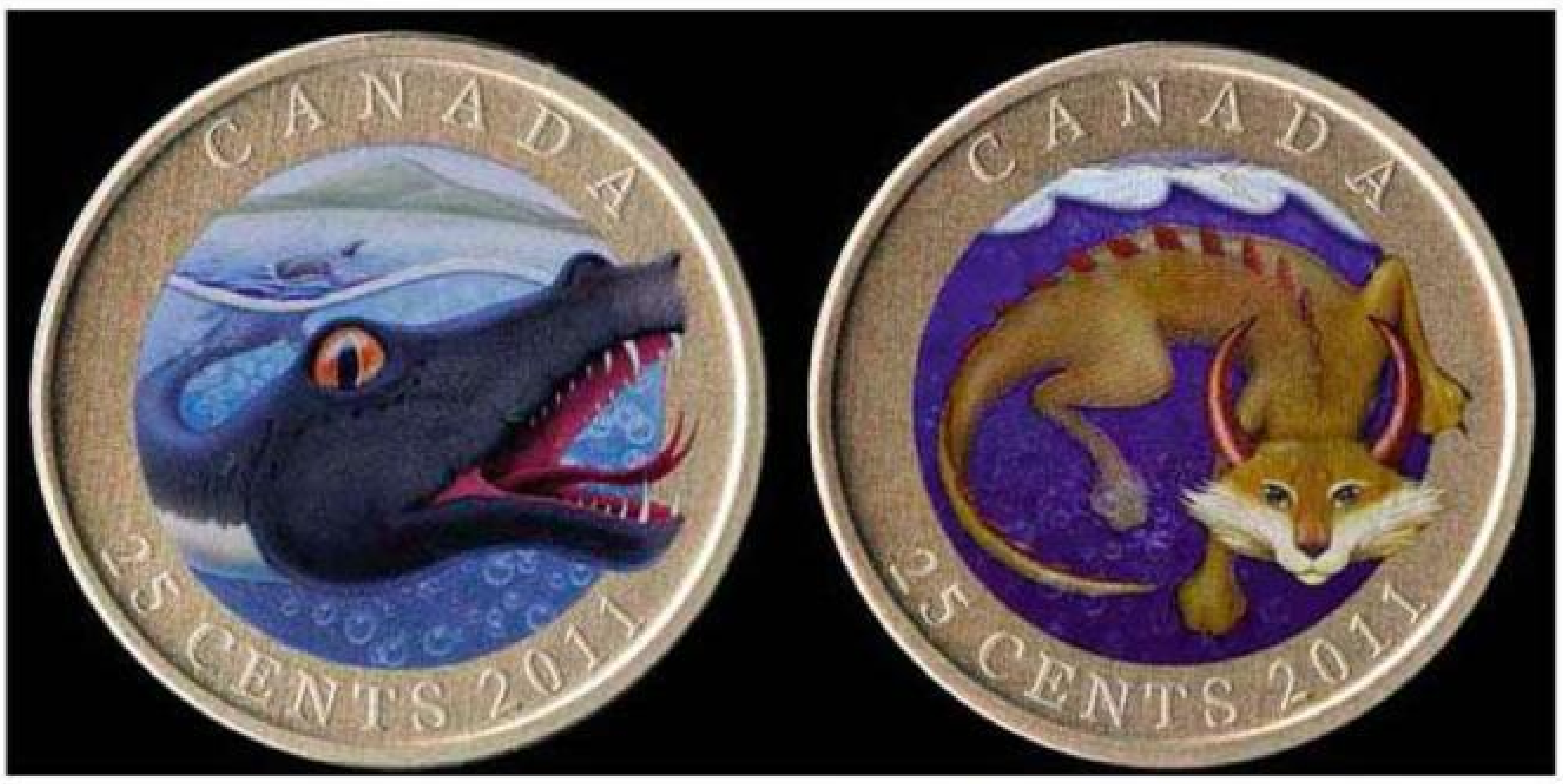
ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER reports on monsters in newly minted currency, a story of an unknown type of jaguar, plus a 19th-century tale of an entombed bat with a most unusual coloration



LEFT: Two of Canada's new cryptozoological coins.

BELOW: The book that referred to the rock jaguar.

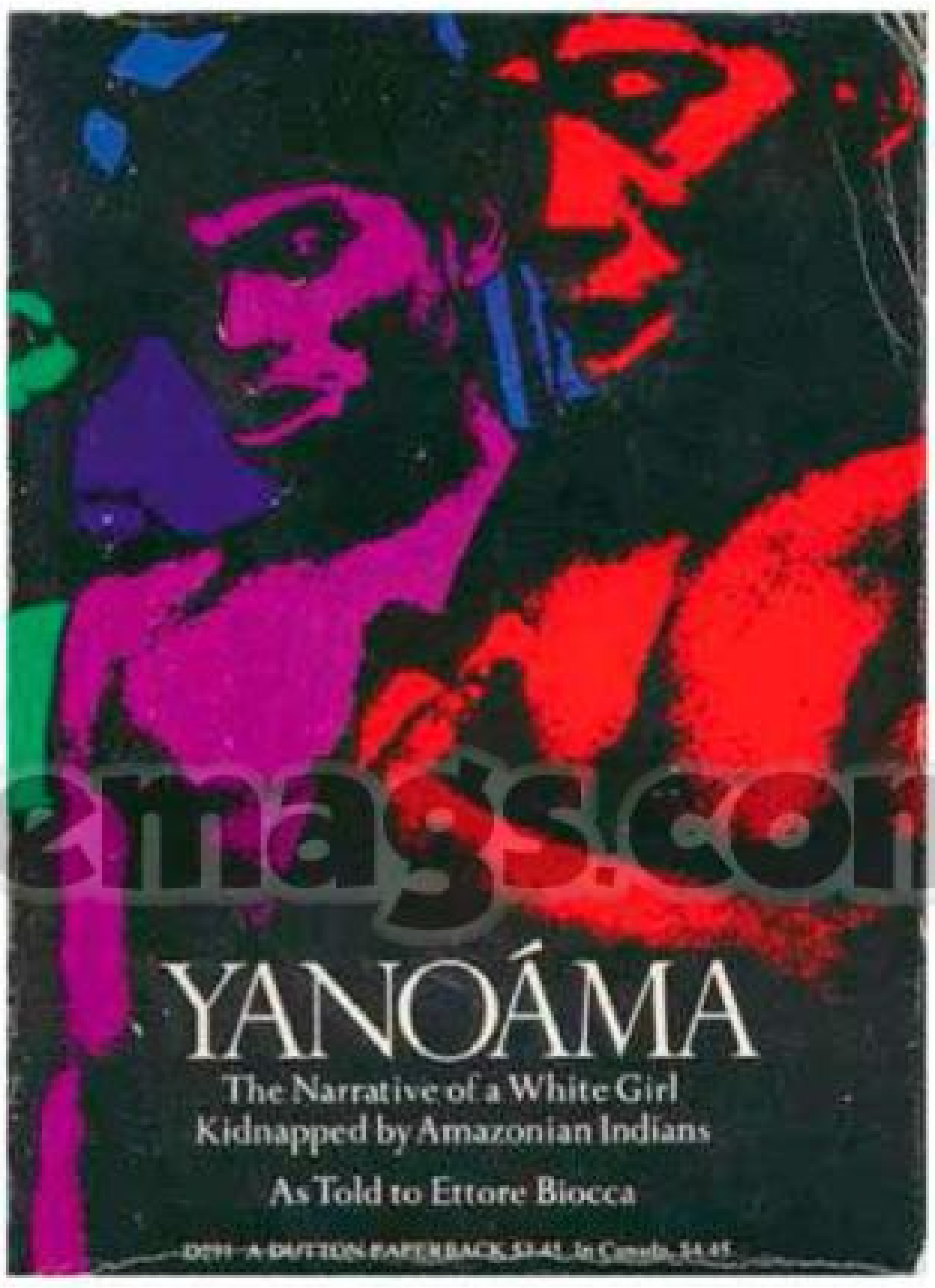
BOTTOM: A 'scarlet bat'.

COINING IT IN FOR CRYPTOZOOLOGY

Back in 1990, Canada hit the philatelic headlines by issuing a set of stamps featuring two notable cryptids – the sasquatch (Bigfoot) and Ogopogo [**FT59:24–25**]. Now, the nation has done the same for numismatics, by issuing a set of three cryptozoology-themed, coloured 25-cent coins. The cryptids featured on them are the sasquatch, Memphré (the dragon-headed serpentine water monster of Lake Memphremagog), and the lesser-known but no less fascinating Mishepishu. This last-named mystery beast, referred to for centuries in traditional Ojibwe legends, is said to inhabit the depths of Lake Superior and to resemble a giant aquatic lynx. Having said that, it is also claimed to be an accomplished shape-shifter, and swims in the other Great Lakes too, in order to protect their precious deposits of copper. As depicted on its coin by illustrator Emily Samstra, Mishepishu sports a pair of long red horns and a series of serrated spines running down its back. Each coin costs 24.95 Canadian dollars to purchase from the Royal Canadian Mint, and is legal tender in Canada. *http://on.io9.com/qFXNKx (io9.com) 19 Sept 2011*.

BETWEEN A ROCK JAGUAR AND A HARD PLACE

I never fail to marvel at the many remarkable, previously unheralded cryptozoological cases that still regularly come to light in non cryptobooks. I am greatly indebted to Ted Leonard for sharing the following crypto-nugget with me. Written by Ettore Biocca, first published in English in 1969 (it was originally published in Italian), and based upon firsthand testimony related to him by its subject, the book in question is *Yanoáma: The Narrative of a White Girl Kidnapped by Amazonian Indians*. It recounts the remarkable true-life story of Helena Valero, who was abducted as an 11-year-old Italian girl by Yanoáma natives back in the 1930s and reared by them in the Amazonian jungle. The mystery beast documented in it was a crypto-felid known locally as the rock jaguar, and was briefly witnessed one day by Valero while in the company of some Yanoáma women and hunters. She described it as follows:


YANOÁMA
The Narrative of a White Girl
Kidnapped by Amazonian Indians
As Told to Ettore Biocca
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"It was morning that day and we had seen among the rocks, as if in a window, a jaguar's head. It was a kind of jaguar which I did not know: it wasn't one of those spotted ones or those red ones that they call *kintanari*. It was a brown jaguar and it had long hair on its head: it was the rock jaguar."

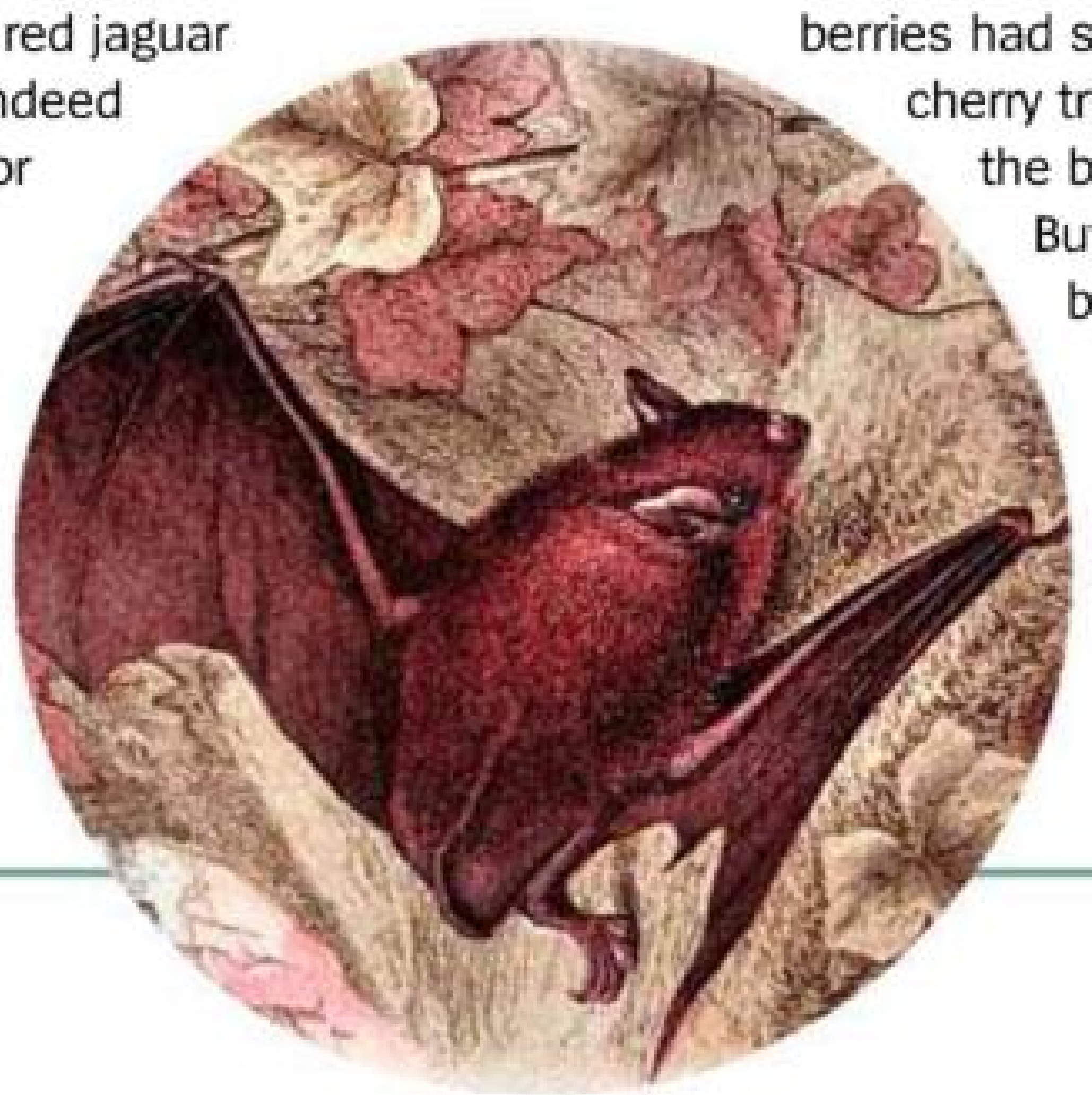
If this description is accurate and authentic, I suspect that it was not a jaguar of any kind, but rather some other, unidentified large-sized cat, brown in colour, with what seems to have been a mane. Intriguingly, that is not the only description on record of such a felid from South America, as a maned mystery cat has also been reported from Ecuador. And what of the equally intriguing red jaguar or kintanari? If it were indeed a jaguar (as opposed, for instance, to a burly, rufous-furred puma), perhaps it was a rare erythristic (abnormally red) mutant individual. *Ted Leonard, pers. comm., 3 Nov 2011*.

A STUDY IN SCARLET?

And speaking of red-furred mystery beasts: the mysterious phenomenon of toads and frogs discovered entombed alive in seemingly solid blocks of stone is well documented (if not well understood), but examples of other creatures similarly incarcerated in solid materials are far less familiar. Consequently, I was very interested to read an old newspaper report unearthed recently by fellow investigator Richard Muirhead. Published by the *Manchester City News* in either March or April 1888, it reads as follows:

"The torpidity in which bats remain through the winter season in the temperate and colder climates is well known, and in common with other animals undergoing the same suspension of powers they have their histories of long imprisonments. The following curious instances may serve to corroborate each other. A woodman engaged in splitting timber for rail posts in the woods close by the lake of Haming, belonging to Mr Pringle in Selkirkshire, discovered in the centre of a large wild cherry tree a living bat of a bright scarlet colour, which, as soon as it was relieved from its entombment, took to its wings and escaped. The recess in the tree was only just large enough to contain the animal; but all around the wood was perfectly sound, solid and free from any opening through which the atmospheric air could reach the bat. A man while occupied in splitting timber near Kelsall, Cheshire, discovered many years ago in the centre of a large pear tree a living bat of a bright scarlet colour, which he foolishly suffered to escape from fear, being fully persuaded that it was not a being of this world. This tree also presented a small cavity in the centre where the bat was enclosed, but was perfectly sound and solid on each side. The scarlet colour of these prisoners is still inexplicable."

Indeed it is. However intriguing the mechanism responsible for their woody encapsulation may be, the anomalous coloration of these bats is even more so, at least to my mind. I hardly need point out that there is no species of scarlet-furred bat native to Britain, so how can their bizarre pigmentation be explained? Could it be that dye from its berries had somehow penetrated the cherry tree's wood and stained the bat encased within it? But what of the pear tree's bat? All thoughts or additional information regarding this extraordinary enigma would be greatly appreciated. *Richard Muirhead in CFZ Bloggo, 4 Nov 2011*.



NECROLOG

We note the passing of one of the two men involved in a classic alien abduction case, a contrarian writer, plus the leader of a Himalayan cult.

CHARLES HICKSON

Charles Hickson and Calvin Parker were the alleged victims of the second most famous alien abduction in history after the Betty and Barney Hill case. On 11 October 1973, Hickson, 42, and Parker, 19, both from Gautier, Mississippi, were fishing in the Pascagoula River off a pier at the abandoned Shaupeter Shipyard at about 9pm when they heard a "zipping sound" behind them. They turned and saw a glowing egg-shaped blue-grey object – about 30ft (9m) long and 8ft (2.4m) high – hovering about 40ft (12m) above the riverbank. Frozen with fright, they watched as a door opened and three creatures floated above the river towards them. "The beings had legs but did not use them," said Hickson. "They were about 5ft [1.5m] tall, had bullet-shaped heads without necks, slits for mouths, and where their noses or ears would be, they had thin, conical objects sticking out, like carrots from a snowman's head. They had no eyes, grey, wrinkled skin, round feet, and claw-like hands."

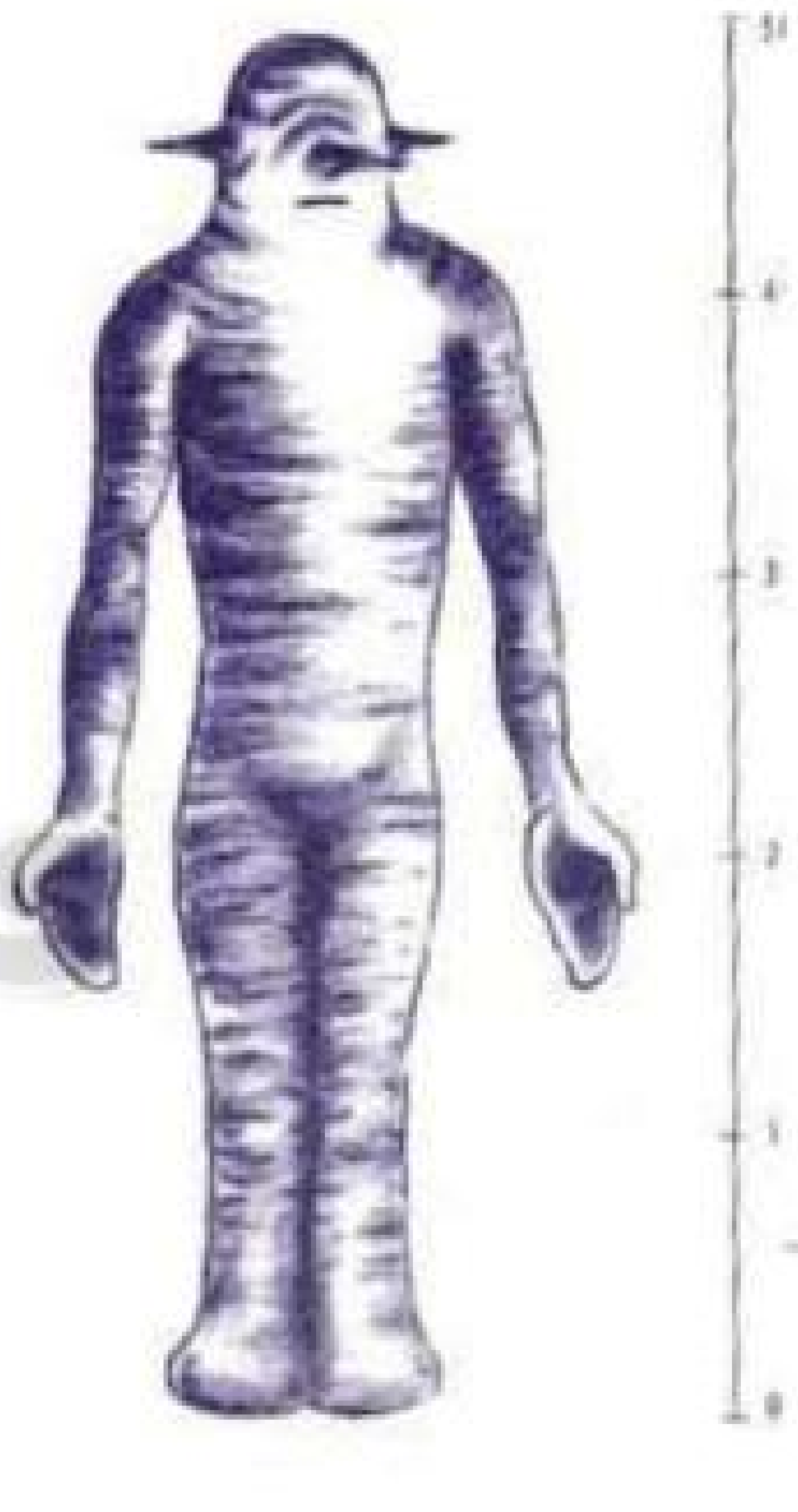
According to Hickson's account, two of the creatures seized him and another grabbed Parker, who fainted. When the creatures placed their 'hands' under his arms, his body became numb, and he was floated into a brightly lit room in the spacecraft, where he was subjected to a medical examination by a large football-shaped mechanical eye, about six to eight inches (15–20cm) in diameter, which seemed to scan his body. The men were released after about 20 minutes and the creatures levitated them, with Hickson's feet dragging along the ground, back to their original positions on the riverbank. Parker had lapsed in and out of consciousness, but remembered being taken towards the craft, hearing a whistling noise and a click, then seeing the bright interior lights just before he was floated back outside. He could not recall what had happened to him inside the craft, although later, during sessions of hypnotic regression, he offered some hazy details.

Expecting only ridicule, Hickson and Parker initially decided to keep quiet. They then thought the government should be informed and called Kessler Air Force Base in Biloxi. A sergeant there told them to contact their local sheriff. After listening to their story, the police put them in a room wired for sound in the belief that if they were left alone they would reveal their hoax; but both men stuck to their story. "My damn arms, my arms," said Parker at one point, "I remember they just froze up and I couldn't move. Just like I stepped on a damn rattlesnake." "They didn't do me that way", sighed Hickson.

The day after the apparent abduction, Hickson's arm bled from what looked like a small puncture wound, at the precise spot where the beings had grabbed him. Hickson passed a polygraph test in New Orleans on 30 October, but arch-sceptic Philip Klass found that the polygraph operator was inexperienced and unqualified, and an investigation by Joe Esterhas ("Claw Men from Outer Space", *Rolling Stone*, 17 Jan 1974) bolstered scepticism: the supposed UFO landing and abduction site was in view of two, 24-hour manned Ingalls Shipyard booths, and neither operator saw anything that night. Also, the site was in range of the shipyard's security cameras, which showed nothing. In his book *UFO Contact at Pascagoula* (1983), which he co-authored with William Mendez, Hickson wrote that aliens contacted him telepathically three times following the abduction – in January 1974 at a local tree farm, in February 1974 at his home and on Mother's Day in 1974 on a local highway. He said the messages were always the same: "We mean you no harm. You are the chosen one. Your world needs our help." Parker, last reported living in Louisiana, has declined to discuss the matter.

Hickson served in the Army during the Korean War. He is survived by two sons, three daughters, 10 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.

Charles E Hickson Sr, alleged alien abductee, born Jones County, Mississippi 1931; died Ocean Springs, Mississippi 9 Sept 2011, aged 80.



HARRY TRUMBORE

RICHARD WEBSTER

Webster challenged *bien pensant* opinion about such thorny issues as the *Satanic Verses* affair, the reputation of Sigmund Freud, and investigations into alleged mass child abuse. In *Why Freud Was Wrong: Sin, Science and Psychoanalysis* (1995), he argued that Freud saw himself as a messianic figure and that his theories represented the covert continuation of Judæo-Christian "original sin".

The Great Children's Home Panic (1998) and *The Secret of Bryn Estyn: the Making of a Modern Witch Hunt* (2005) concerned the care home for adolescent boys that became the focus of a police investigation into suspected child abuse that spread across a number of residential homes in North Wales. Webster argued that the investigations were disfigured by a zealotry that made miscarriages of justice almost inevitable; they reversed normal police methods, notably by starting with suspects and then trawling for potential victims to find out whether a crime had been committed.

Modern scandals of mass abuse, which "inevitably undermine the credibility of those who make genuine allegations", he argued, were analogous to the old witch-hunts and were fuelled by the same urge "to purify the world through the annihilation of some category of human beings imagined as agents of corruption and incarnations of evil". Webster's last book, *Casa Pia: The Making of a Modern European Witch Hunt* (2011), was an account of a pædophile-ring scare in Portugal that had led to several prominent figures sent to jail without, in his view, any credible evidence against them.

Richard Webster, contrarian writer, born 17 Dec 1950; died 23 June 2011, aged 60.

Stonemags

SAMDUP TASO

Taso was the last in an ancient line of shamans responsible for leading the indigenous Lepcha people of Sikkim in prayers to the mountain deity of Kanchenjunga – the world's third-highest mountain peak. The Lepchas are regarded as the original inhabitants of Sikkim, a kingdom that became part of India in 1975 following an uprising against the Chogyal (king) by the majority Nepalese population who had migrated into the region in the 19th century. Lepchas have worshipped Kanchenjunga since the 13th century, in ceremonies led by a hereditary priest called the Bongthing, which culminate in special rituals during the month of Kursong (February–March). Taso, believed to be a descendant of the first Bongthing, would begin the annual ceremonies with overnight prayers at his home in Nung, the first Lepcha settlement, in the Dzongu region of north Sikkim. The next morning, he would lead a large procession towards Lha-thu, an open-air altar, singing processional songs that traced the history of the Lepchas and explained the ritual.

So powerful was the belief in the divinity of Kanchenjunga that the British climbers who conquered the mountain in 1955 stopped just short of the peak out of respect for Lepcha culture. Subsequent expeditions followed suit. In 1973, however, the Chogyal decreed that a yak sacrifice, which had been part of the ancient ritual, should be discontinued as being against the tenets of Buddhism. Taso, it is said, believed that the discontinuation of the sacrifice displeased the mountain deity and brought an end to the 300-year-old Namgyal dynasty of the Chogyals. After 1975, the Lepchas' traditional shamanistic faith declined as most Lepchas converted to Buddhism or Christianity. Taso, whose son has not become a priest, died without anointing a successor.

Samdup Taso, shaman, born 1928; died 29 Oct 2011, aged 83.

FOR MORE STRANGE DEATHS GO TO:
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Strange deaths

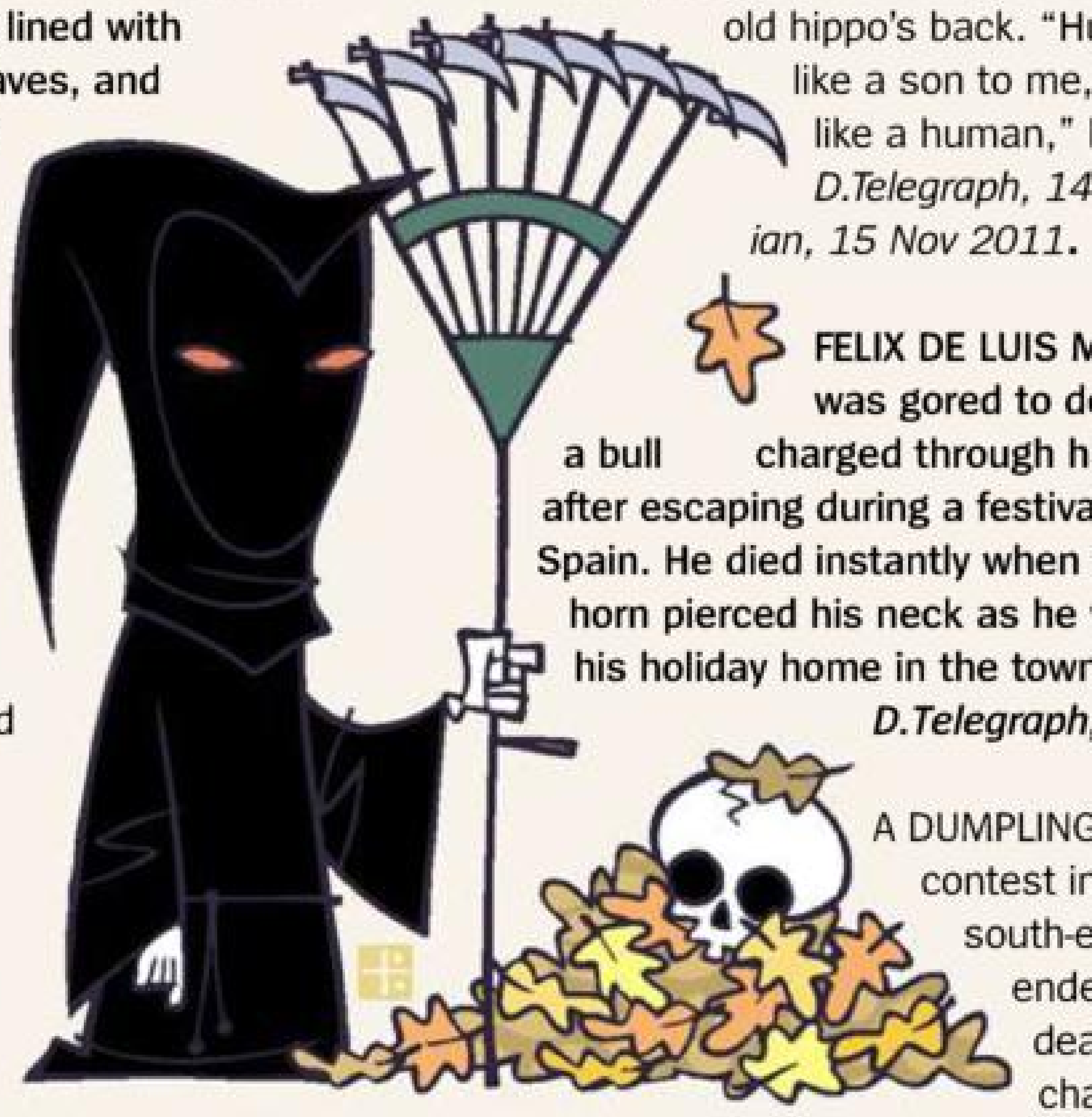
UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

MATTHEW HOFFMAN, 30, AN UNEMPLOYED tree trimmer from Mount Vernon, Ohio, is serving a life sentence for holding a 13-year-old girl hostage after killing her brother Kody Maynard, 11, her mother Tina Hermann, and her mother's friend Stephanie Sprang and stuffing their dismembered bodies in a hollow tree. Hoffman had an obsession with trees and leaves. His living room was stuffed with leaves, the bathroom was lined with more than 100 bags of leaves, and the captive teenager was kept bound hand and foot on a bed of leaves in the basement. His freezer contained only a couple of red popsicles and two dead squirrels. *ABC News, 10 Feb 2011.*

WHITESON MWANDIYA, 55, was beheaded when a giant pane of glass sliced through his neck as he unloaded it. He was in a six-man team removing the delivery from a truck in Kitwe, Zambia, when it began to topple. His colleague Richard Kasongo, 40, also died after suffering cuts all over his body. The other four were unhurt. *D.Mirror, 10 Nov 2011.*

POLICE IN INDONESIA SHOT DEAD THREE OF seven dogs suspected of eating their 60-year-old owner after he left them shut up in his house for two weeks without food while he went on holiday. A relative found dismembered parts of André Lumboga's body in the kitchen of his Batam Island house on 6 September, his luggage still stacked in front of the house from his return on 30 August. "The victim was believed to have had nine dogs," said police chief Eriyana. "Two of the dogs were eaten by the others." *MX News (Sydney), Canberra Times, 8 Sept 2011.*

A FARMER IN SOUTH AFRICA WAS KILLED BY his pet hippopotamus on 12 November after repeated warnings that it could never be tamed. Marius Els, 41, an army major, was bitten to death by the 1,200kg (2,646lb) hippo he named Humphrey and tried to domesticate on his farm near Klerksdorp in Free State province. Els's body was found in the river where, years earlier, the hippo had been rescued from a flood. It was bought by Els at the age of five months and became a pet on his 400-acre (160ha) farm, learning to swim with humans. Els kept 20 different species of exotic animals, including giraffe and rhino. Earlier this year, he was photographed riding on the five-year-old hippo's back. "Humphrey's like a son to me, he's just like a human," he said. *D.Telegraph, 14 Nov; Guardian, 15 Nov 2011.*



FELIX DE LUIS MORETIN, 74, was gored to death when a bull charged through his front door after escaping during a festival in Lodosa, Spain. He died instantly when the bull's horn pierced his neck as he was sitting in his holiday home in the town of Navarra. *D.Telegraph, 4 Aug 2011.*

A DUMPLING-EATING contest in Tokmak, south-east Ukraine, ended with the death of the champion on 18 September. Ivan Mendel, 77, ate 10 dumplings in half a minute to win first prize of a one-litre jar of sour cream. Shortly afterwards, he became unwell and died. A doctor concluded that he had choked on vomit. Known in the Ukraine as *vareniki*, dough balls are a staple of the regional diet, and are often stuffed with a range of fillings from mushrooms to cherries. *[R] Guardian, 22 Sept 2011.*

MIKEY WELSH, 40, WHO PLAYED BASS WITH the US indie band Weezer from 1998 to 2001, was found dead on Saturday, 8 October, two weeks after predicting the time and place of his death. He died of a suspected overdose while visiting Chicago to see his old band at a festival. His body was found on the floor of his Rafaello Hotel room. On 26 September, he tweeted: "Dreamt I died in Chicago next weekend (heart attack in my sleep). Need to write my will today." Shortly after, he tweeted: "Correction: The weekend after next." The father of two had become an artist. *Sun, 11 Oct 2011.*

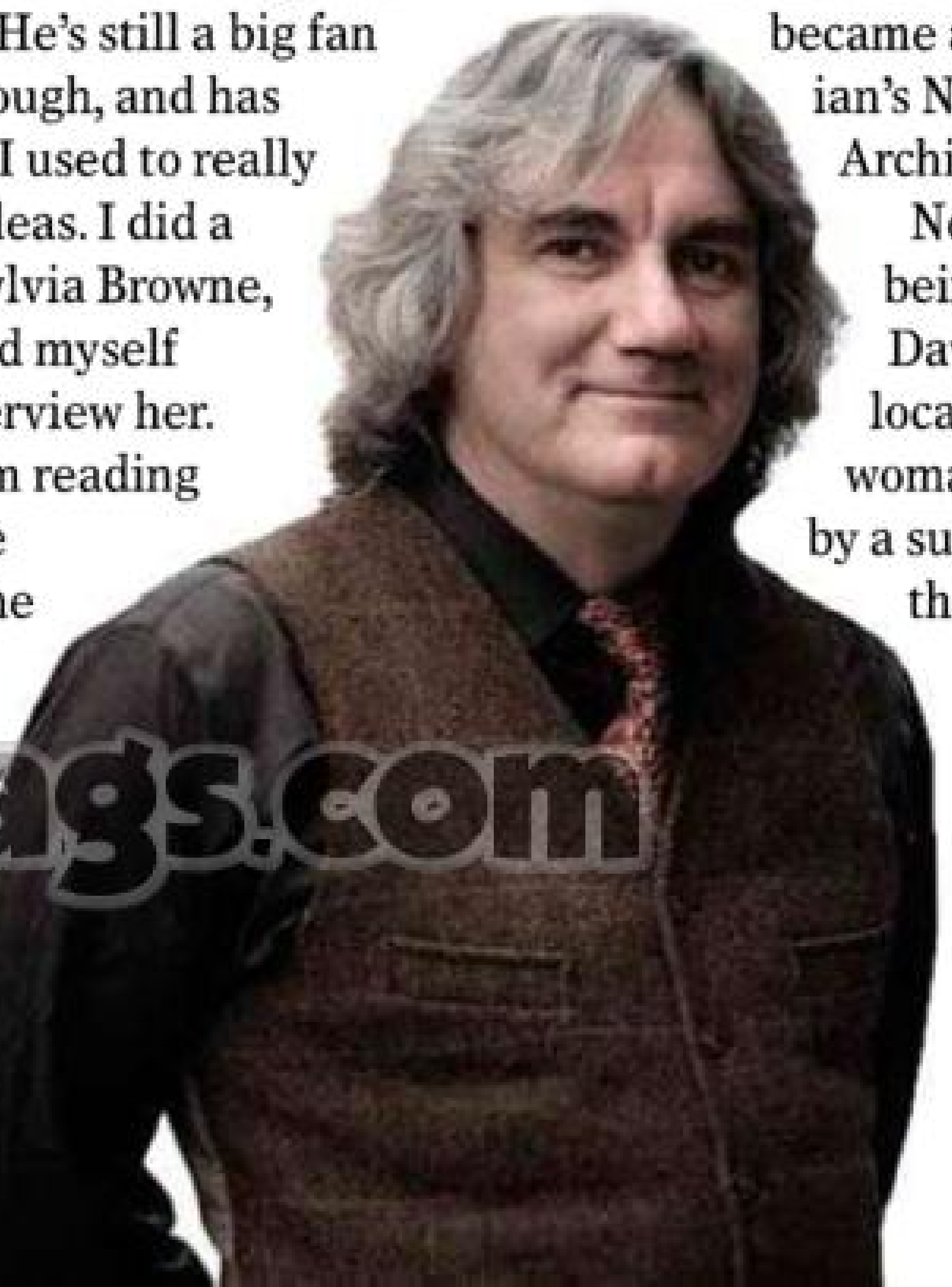
TERRY COLON

UNCON 2011

The weekend of 12–13 November saw UnConvention 2011 right in the heart of London. For those who couldn't make it, and for those whose memories are already fading, **STUART FERROL** gives you all the juicy details. Photography by **ETIENNE GILFILLAN**.

Hallowe'en might have faded a fortnight before, but there was an aftershock of weirdness around London's Kings' Cross on the weekend of 12–13 November as the fortean faithful flocked to UnConvention 2011. Held in the spacious art deco hall of the Camden Centre, this year's saw a return to the single-stream format for talks – a relief of those of us tormented by the dilemma of which lectures to plump for – and a late-night session (see panel).

We kicked off with best-selling author and documentary-maker Jon Ronson, talking about his book *The Psychopath Test* and revealing just how many of the world's corporate movers-and-shakers would satisfy the test's criteria. This was Jon's second time at UnCon, his first being the infamous 2002 gathering, the ghost of which seemed to rattle its chains just offstage throughout this year's event. "I bet after *Men Who Stare At Goats* came out they thought 'Ooh – he's too grand now'," Jon told me. He's still a big fan of *Fortean Times*, though, and has found it inspiring. "I used to really scour *FT* for story ideas. I did a piece once about Sylvia Browne, the psychic – booked myself onto a cruise to interview her. That idea came from reading about her in *FT*. I've moved away from the paranormal type stuff a little, but I still really like it and buy it regularly."



Then it was the turn of Brian Regal, Assistant Professor for the History of Science at Kean University, New Jersey, taking his first Uncon bow. Brian regaled us with tales of Grover Krantz, a scientist who put his reputation on the line over his belief that the Sasquatch was an actual animal, and the ridicule, threats and abuse he received in return. I asked him how he became interested in such cryptids as Sasquatch and Krantz's involvement with them. "While I was working on my doctoral dissertation on the history of evolutionary thought, I came across monster-hunting and realised that little or nothing had been done on it from a scholarly point of view. It was also about this time in 2006 that Krantz's papers became available at the Smithsonian's National Anthropological Archive."

Next, we narrowly avoided being "Scared to Death" by Dr David Clarke's talk on a case local to his native Sheffield of a woman being fatally frightened by a supposed ghost (you can read the full story on pp34–39).

Lunchtime offered an opportunity to visit stalls featuring fortean books, *FT* merchandise, speaker signing-sessions and the welcome presence of Hunt Emerson, *FT*'s resident cartoonist. Signing artwork and drawing caricatures of anyone brave enough to sit for him, Hunt explained to me that his first ever strip for *FT* was in 1975, in issue 8 of *The News*, as it was then called: "I met Bob Rickard in Birmingham when he was living up there and still typing up the mag in his bedroom. When I arrived in Birmingham, I had just left college and was new to this subject – never come across it before. I actually met Bob in a bookshop and he asked me to do some drawings for the magazine and it was just about my first published work. So I've been in the mag off and on ever since, and have been doing the monthly Phenomenomix strip for over 25 years."

We returned to the main hall for UnCon stalwart Dr Jan Bondeson's elaboration on his recent *FT* cover story about supposedly super-intelligent dogs, including such celebrities of their time as Don the talking Pointer and Rolf the philosophical Airedale terrier. Many other talented pets were paraded for the audience's entertainment, but I was disappointed not to see the Yorkshire terrier who said "Sausages" on the BBC's 1970s show *That's Life*.

Next, Richard Freeman of the Centre for Fortean Zoology was back with news from his expedition to Sumatra, where he'd been once again, gathering evidence for

TOP LEFT TO RIGHT: Jon Ronson signs; Sparky Williams the talking budgie; fun at the Fortean Times Pub Quiz; attentive UnCon-goers; Ted Harrison gets ready for the End.
BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: Brian Regal; Gail-Nina Anderson; Sarah Angliss and her Edison Phonograph; Dr Jan Bondeson; Hunt Emerson dashes off a quick caricature.

the existence of the orang-pendek, the upright walking primate rumoured to exist there. Not only did the team find prints, but they also uncovered tantalising evidence of a possible relation to the orang-pendek inhabiting the same area – a diminutive, almost hairless primate that bore a striking resemblance to the 3ft (90cm)-tall alleged "Hobbits" found on Flores Island.

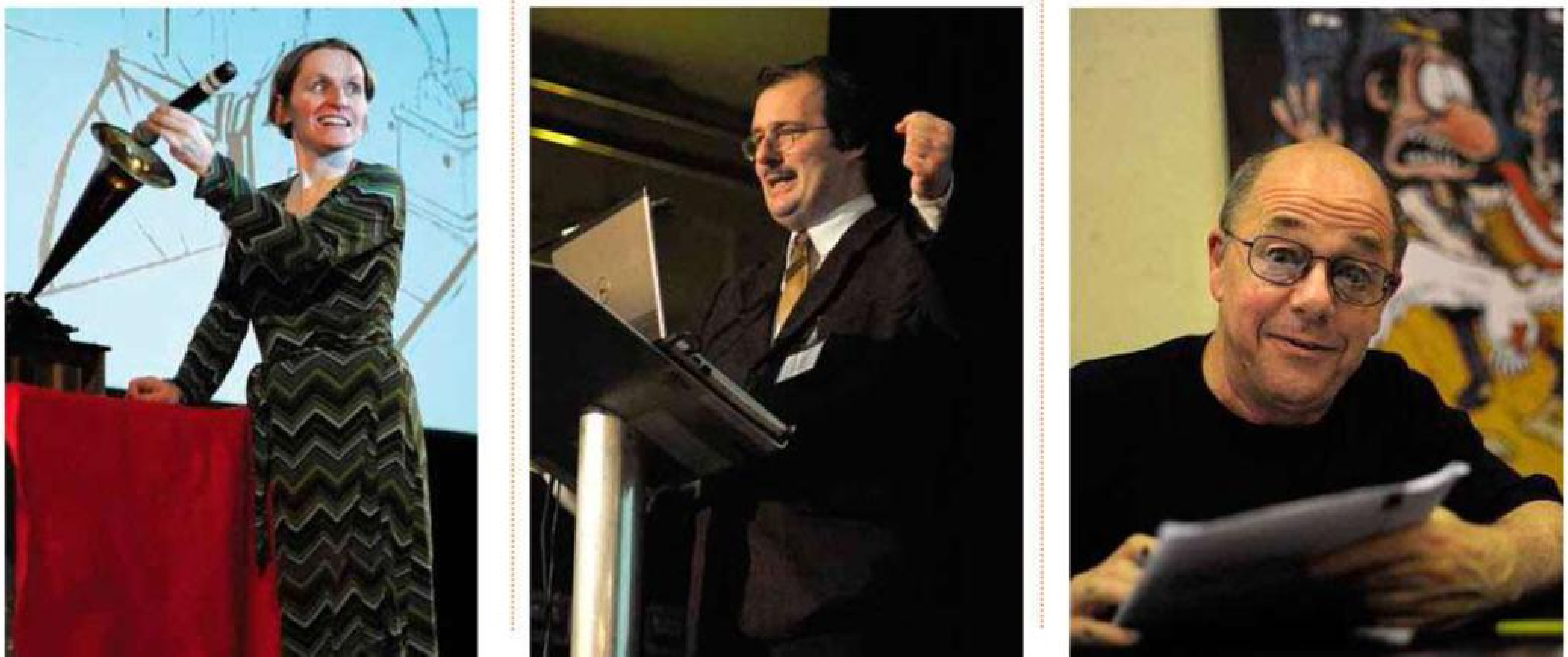
We wound up the first day with another UnCon debutante, award-winning composer, performer and historian of science Sarah Angliss. I met Sarah and her collection of audio gadgetry backstage as she explained how she became fascinated by sound technology. "I have a science background, but I'm really interested in those times when people were receptive to some ideas that were rather strange, usually because they were trying to get to grips with new technology and what it meant – ideas around survival of death that were creeping into popular culture when sound recording came in; how people could hear a disembodied voice of someone who was now dead." With her array of weird and wonderful audio equipment, including an authentic Edison Phonograph and that star of classic sci-fi movie soundtracks, the Theremin, Sarah took us on a journey through the early days of sound and the first attempts to immortalise the human voice. We were privileged to hear the only recording of Florence Nightingale (not to mention Hoover the talking seal) and to witness first-hand the method of recording voices at this time in all its head-stuffed-down-the-horn simplicity. Next, during Sarah's astounding performance on the Theremin, we were introduced to the "singer" of her band Spacedog – Hugo, a ventriloquist dummy's head perched on top of a transparent box of mechanical workings. Ventroliquism was an unexpected thread running through this year's Uncon: from Sarah's talented friend to Jan Bondeson's cacophonous canines and then onto the talk and film showing that book-ended Sunday's events.

Ventriloquism was a surprise thread through the 2011 UnCon

Kicking off Sunday's programme was another UnCon first-timer, Christopher Josiffe. Expanding on his article on Gef the talking mongoose in **FT269**, Christopher described his trips to the scene of the "haunting" on the Isle of Man and his questioning of the locals. The suggestion of ventriloquism reared its articulated head – a sort of 1930s Gordon the Gopher or Roland Rat – but this was quickly quashed, as it was pointed out that in very few instances were the same family members in the room with Gef at the times he spoke. Christopher raised some laughs by attempting an impersonation of Gef's shrieking voice – somewhere between Kenneth Williams and Peter Cook as EL Wisty. He concluded by reaffirming the impossibility of reaching a wholly satisfactory explanation of the case, and reminded us of Gef's defiant statement: "They'll never catch me! They just want to put me in a bottle!"

David Clarke returned, this time with Flying Saucery cohort Andy Roberts, for their talk on Cursed Stones and Haunted Heads. Why is there such a widespread belief that touching or taking some stones from ancient sites can lead to disaster? The talk covered a veritable quarry of stones supposedly imbued with the elemental forces feared and worshipped by our ancestors. These included the Tigh nam Bodach pagan shrine at Glenlyon in the Scottish Highlands, possibly the last surviving example of a pagan tradition in the British Isles but sadly now at risk from a hydroelectric dam scheme. Scottish folklorist Margaret Bennett has warned of dire consequences for those who disturb the stones with this new project, and let's hope this warning is heeded. Arguably the best-known case of haunted stones is that of the stone heads found by two boys in a council house garden in Hexham, Northumberland – a discovery which triggered poltergeist activity and the appearance of a "weresheep" in a neighbour's bedroom and a werewolf in the home of the Celtic scholar Dr Anne Ross. To add even more intrigue to the story, a local man came forward to claim he had made the heads. The debate continues in a case that David Clarke described as "a classic in the supernatural field that remains an unsolved mystery to this day".

Finally, Clarke and Roberts's sheet-covered



FORTEAN TIMES UNCONVENTION 2011
UNCON
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LATE

The winning team

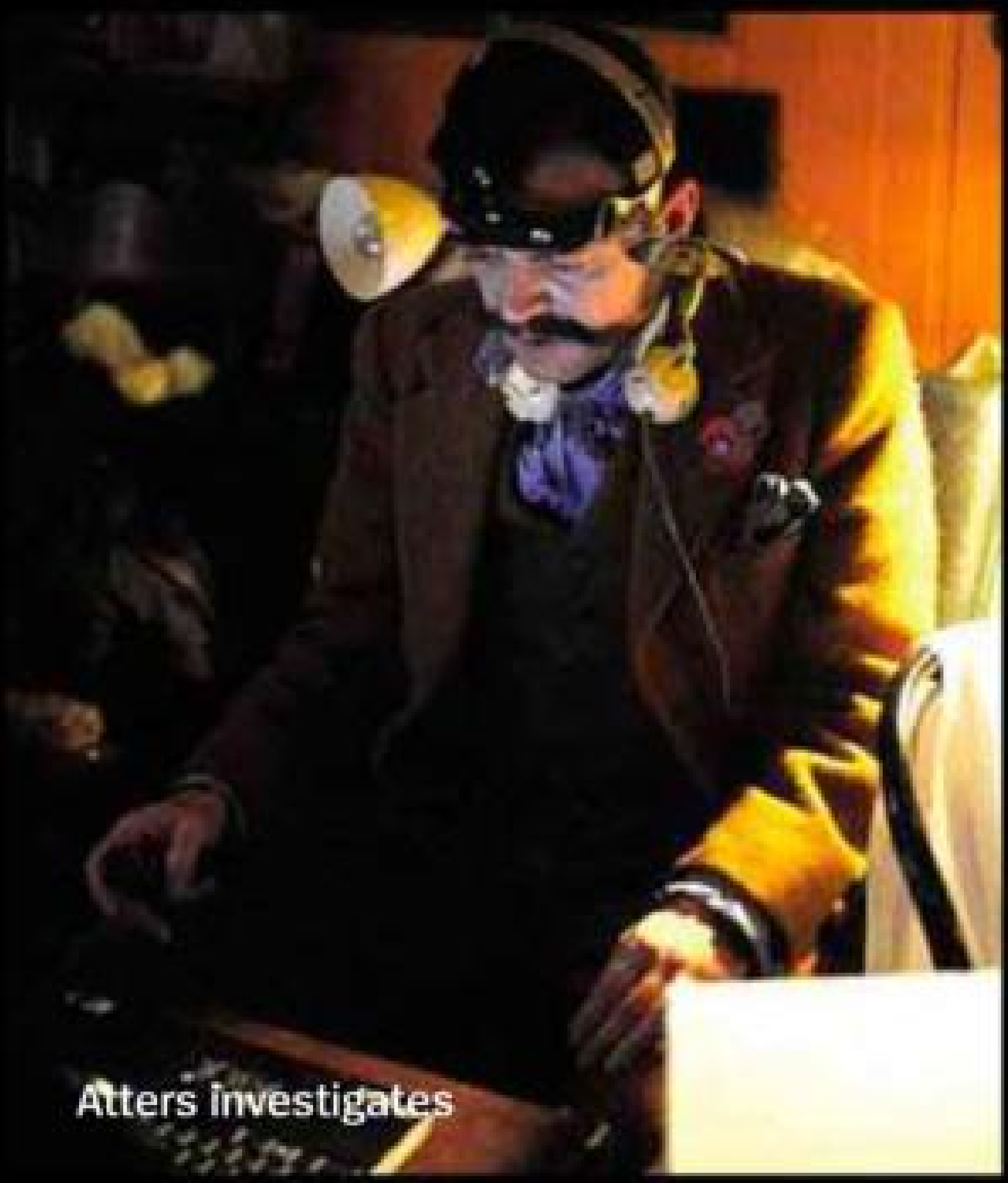
Sarah Angliss tunes in

This year's UnConvention came complete with a naughty nocturnal addendum, UnCon Late. It was held at The Boot, a traditional Irish pub, complete with landlord and lady, Packie and Mary, frequented in the past by Kenneth Williams and Charles Dickens and mentioned by the latter in *Barnaby Rudge*. The pub usually has a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere, but this wasn't your usual Saturday night. I asked the convivial Packie the next day if they'd ever had a night like UnCon Late before and he confessed, "No, never anything quite like that – but it was great fun!"

Indeed it was, and it's impossible to capture in words the laughter, weirdness and chaos we enjoyed that night. It started with The Great Fortean Times Pub Quiz, chaired by our esteemed editor Dr David Sutton. Making up tables of quiz teams with such names as "Closed X-Files", "Men and Women Who Stare At Quizzes", and "Otto Von Bismarck's Grand Dore", we were given a clear lesson on how much we *didn't* actually know about forteana. Some teams could have been accused of having an unfair advantage, by constantly haranguing our quizmaster for points for semi-correct answers or by having last year's UnCon speaker, *Doctor Who* scribe and self-confessed super-geek Paul Cornell, on their team! Saying that, I was proud to boast as members of my table Dan, a drag artist with a huge knowledge of forteana (and trains) who had appeared on *Britain's Got Talent* (and would be performing later) and a man calling himself The Hatfield Rocket (although also known as Ben Foong), who dresses up as, you guessed it, a rocket to raise money for charity (it all started when he became an audience volunteer during Helen Keen's "It *is* Rocket Science" performance at last year's UnCon).

Despite missed questions, being given the answers to some questions *Jeopardy*-style and having mind-boggingly obscure pictures to identify (including Coronation Street's William Roache in full Druid gear), someone actually won; the honours went to Herr Bismarck and his Grand Dore, who walked away with armloads of books, Blu-Rays and DVDs. There were runners-up awards, and booby prizes (including such DVD clunkers as *Planes That Never Flew*) went to *Closed X-Files*, one government cut that was obviously much needed.

Tia-Anna Sore-Ass Wrecked
(assisted by The Hatfield Rocket)


Atters investigates

The live entertainment half of the night kicked off with *The Chap* magazine's Michael "Atters" Attree, dapper and spectacularly moustached gentleman satirist, sharing the fruits of his paranormal investigations using a laptop, projector and an array of various instruments attached to his head. These paranormal terrors included Glow Worm Boy, The Flying Pekingese, a magnetic man from the Ukraine (of course), Derek Acorah and the Grotesque Ventriloquist. Special attention was given to a case of Spontaneous Human Combustion in a Brighton seafront shelter. The victim was believed to be an alcoholic match-seller, but Atters queried whether the slow-burning 'wick effect' explanation for SHC should be joined by brussels sprouts and Chinese lanterns.

Atters's dissertations were more than aptly illustrated by his visuals, especially during his studies of "The Angry UFO" and "Clairvoyance". In the former, the sighting necessitated the scrambling of military aircraft and Nick Pope, and the after-effects included the incidence of pregnancy within the RAF rising by 0.1 per cent; Atters responded, as any true fortean investigator should, by taking swabs. His search for proof of clairvoyance demanded a young topless female psychic and the specific application of electrodes. Again, swabs were taken. The final, and most bizarre, inquiry was into ectoplasm and involved our protagonist being invited to a Ladies Table Tappers and Shunters Club to witness a mass expulsion of said material. Matters, with Atters, got out of hand as (again) all the ladies' clothes fell off, and he was wrestled to the ground and doused with a group ejaculation of ectoplasm (finished off with a delightful decoration of Jelly Tots and birthday candles). Sadly, this was where the presentation was cut short by that bane of paranormal research, "equipment failure".

Helen Keen made quite an impression at last year's UnCon with her scientific stand-up routine. Last year it was rockets to the Moon, and this year we arrived at our natural satellite via a hilarious omnibus of its possible inhabitants, illustrated by a moon pie-chart made up of such contenders as Nazis and the Clangers. Helen then told the tall story, marvellously illuminated by assistant Miriam's shadow puppetry, of John Herschel's observations of the Moon's inhabitants – Beaver People and Hairy Yellow Man Bats – and the astronomer's subsequent embarrassment; even the size of his instrument had been exaggerated. Helen's second subject was inspired by her temping experiences with that bane of office workers' lives, the photocopier, and explored the life and times of its inventor, Chester Floyd Carlson. Raised in a chicken coop by his consumptive father, Chester went on to dream up the photocopier (the first trial machines tended to give people electric shocks or catch fire, so were fitted with fire extinguishers) and made a fortune. At the end of his life, though, he decided that he wanted to die as poor as he'd started out, and to this end gave away millions of dollars – including at least one million to fund parapsychological research!

Next up, Sarah Angliss gave us more amazing Theremin manipulation, this time not only accompanied by Hugo but also by a singing, demonically red-eyed, robotic crow. As well as the haunting sound of the Theremin, Sarah's music was informed by such diverse samples as Kate Bush, The Beastie Boys, instructions on how to teach a bird to talk and the theme from *Get Carter*. She concluded with a stunning version of "Willow's Song" from *The Wicker Man*.

As we hurtled seat-of-the-pants-close to kicking-out time, Tia-Anna Sore-Ass Wrecked (I didn't get that joke until much later; I blame the drink and the long day) as The Kate Blush Experience finally took the stage and treated us to a performance that is impossible to capture in words alone but bravely challenged our preconceptions of what constitutes entertainment, performance and, indeed, singing. Ben Foong, the Hatfield Rocket himself, was railroaded into volunteering once again as Tia-Anna's (Dan to his bank manager) subject and make-up model for *Wicked* showstopper "Popular". Ben's torture ended and Tia-Anna took centre stage for two unforgettable renditions of "Whiter Shade Of Pale" and "Wuthering Heights", complete with wig and costume changes. The fact that Dan's severe cold necessitated interruptions for hacking coughs and a brief sit-down only added to the uniqueness of the performance.

We happy few who were present will long be able to say that we witnessed it, and enjoyed a night in a pub quite unlike any other. For those of you who, sadly, weren't there: maybe next year, folks!

NINA CONTI/HER MASTER'S VOICE

ABOVE: Nina Conti paid a cinematic tribute to mentor Ken Campbell.
BELOW: Jon and Corrina Downes at the CFZ stall.

on-stage guest was unveiled. Humpty Dumpty is a large stone head (of similarly debatable authenticity to the Hexham examples) with (allegedly) an attached curse, and great fun was had with the tabloid claims of the owners who had suffered such terrible fates as bankruptcy and yuppie flu. To end their talk, Dave and Andy threw down the gauntlet and invited anyone courageous, or foolish, enough to come and hold the head after their talk. As I was due to fly back to Newcastle, I thought it best not to tempt fate!

The Hermetic origins of modern science and the possibility of a secret brotherhood containing the greatest minds of history were the subjects of the talk by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince. Were Copernicus, Newton, Kepler, Galileo and other pioneers of science occultists inspired by Hermeticism? This was no *Da Vinci Code*-style potboiler, although early scientific connections to strange societies and beliefs were brought excitingly to life in this talk by two heavyweight historical conspiracists.

Heading into the post-lunch home stretch, ex-BBC Religious Affairs correspondent Ted Harrison gave a rapturous rundown of apocalypse no-shows. Recounting his communications with Harold Camping's followers, Ted observed wryly that, despite the doomsayer's insistence on Armageddon falling on 21 May 2011, his radio station Family Radio still advertised a schedule of shows to follow it! Obviously, they were committed to entertaining those who Jesus didn't want for a moonbeam.

Next, Gail-Nina Anderson gave one of her trademark examinations of the popular media's representation of a monster or myth. This year she focused, typically and engagingly, on the Mummy, charting its shuffling rise from publicly unravelling spectacle to classic horror movie monster. I'd reminded Gail-Nina of UnCon 2002 and how she'd followed Ken Campbell's infamous Gastromancy demonstration with the opening line of her talk: "If you're expecting me to shoot water out of my backside you are going to be disappointed." And I was.

I'd come into Ken's 2002 talk a little late and stood at the side next to a diminutive lady who seemed to be wearing only a business suit jacket. At the end of the talk, Ken called for "Mouse" to join him and suddenly the lady next to me moved onto the stage. After the careful application of a funnel and a jug of water it became apparent why she was semi-naked. Then, we watched in shock as "Mouse" expelled a jet of water out of her bottom right back to the fourth or fifth row.

And it was with the memory of Ken Campbell that we finished this year's Uncon, the thread of ventriloquism that had wound its way through the weekend reaching its crescendo. We were privileged to view Nina Conti's new film about her old master and her conflict over whether to continue the ventriloquism Ken had helped her perfect. It was an emotional, funny and thoughtful journey, as Nina attended a convention in America and struggled over which dummy of Ken's she should donate to Venthaven, a retirement home for the orphaned dummies of ventriloquists no longer with us. It was a fitting tribute to arguably the biggest star of UnCons past, and a lovely conclusion to this year's.

We filed out into the darkening early evening wondering what would be in store for us next year. Would there be another UnCon Late event, and if so how could they top this year's? Anybody got Mouse's number? FT

AUTHOR BIOG

STUART FERROL is a writer, actor/performer and community media company director from north-east England. He has previously written for *FT* on the Hexham wolf and other topics. This is his second report on UnCon goings-on.

the UFO files

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FLYINGSAUCERY

DAVID CLARKE AND ANDY ROBERTS UNCOVER A CASE FROM THE ARCHIVES IN WHICH THE BOYS IN BLUE CAME UP AGAINST THE MEN IN BLACK.

ON THE SAUCER BEAT

The vast majority of sightings logged by the Ministry of Defence's UFO desk were made by members of the public and were never followed up. Occasionally, more detailed accounts arrived from civilians who were regarded as trained observers, such as pilots and police officers. These were taken more seriously and copied to other "specialist branches". A declassified note by John Peduzie, head of S4 (Air) from March 1976 notes that "[These] branches have their own methods – and [the UFO desk] has 'no need to know' about them – but we are aware that DI55 sometimes makes extensive enquiries" (see **FT226:32–33**). Peduzie wrote that "[I]t is undesirable that even a hint of this should become public" and even at that time plans were being made to "expurgate official records against the time when they qualify for exposure".

It's no surprise, then, that most of the intelligence files on UFO investigations were destroyed long before the arrival of Freedom of Information. Fortunately, a few papers survived in the S4 (Air) UFO desk files, preserved at The National Archives. These show that, on some occasions, intelligence officers were sent to conduct field investigations.

Possibly the best documented example happened in March 1966 when Cheshire police constable Colin Perks saw a "flying saucer" hovering behind a row of shops at Wilmslow, in the early hours of the morning. The next day, he produced a sketch of the UFO at the request of his chief constable. This depicts an elliptical object – the size of a bus – from which emanated an eerie green glow. Within seconds, the "object" disappeared at speed in a weird sideways movement. Flt Lt Mercer's report was passed to the MoD, which sent a Defence Intelligence officer from London to interview Perks and visit the scene. Nothing was seen on radar and no other witnesses located. Nevertheless, the officer's report concluded: "There is no reason to doubt the fact that this constable saw something completely foreign to his previous experience."

Unannounced visits by officials to witnesses are a rare but not unknown phenomenon. Following the media furore over his 'Solway Spaceman' photograph in 1964 (**FT196:29**), Cumbrian fireman Jim Templeton was surprised to find two smartly dressed men calling at his Fire Station. 'Number 9' and 'Number 11', as they referred to themselves, flashed official-looking ID at Templeton before driving him out to the lonely Solway marsh where he had unwittingly snapped the famous 'spaceman'. When Templeton refused to give in to their insistence that he had only seen an ordinary passer by, they drove off in their shiny Jaguar car leaving him to walk several miles home.

MARTYN JOHNSON

DAVID CLARKE

LEFT: A uniformed PC Martyn Johnson.
BELOW: Martyn at home in Rotherham today.

It is possible – indeed likely – that some of these visits were responsible for rumours about the activities of the sinister 'Men In Black' (MIB), made famous in the movie starring Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones (released in 1997). In UFO folklore, the MIB are sinister figures who, it has been claimed, pay visits to witnesses to collect evidence and attempt to persuade them not to talk about their experiences. Their immaculate black suits and cars have led some ufologists to believe the MIB are employed by a secret government alien investigation agency. Until recently, there were few well-known examples of visits from MIB visits to British UFO witnesses, but in 2010 a retired Yorkshire CID officer published a detailed and hitherto unknown account of a meeting with two of its members in his memoirs, *What's Tha Up To?* (Pen & Sword).

PC Martyn Johnson was 25 years old in 1968 and had been a beat copper in the Yorkshire city of Sheffield for six years. On Monday 22 July, "a lovely summer night", he completed a foot patrol on the Manor estate and called to see his girlfriend (and future wife) Christine, who lived in Darnall near his lodgings.

Now off-duty, Johnson admits that UFOs and aliens were the last thing on his mind that night. He was looking forward to a kiss and a cuddle and the opportunity to take the family poodle for a walk in nearby High Hazels Park. But as midnight approached and the couple walked hand-in-hand along Logan Road, it became obvious this wasn't going to be an ordinary night.

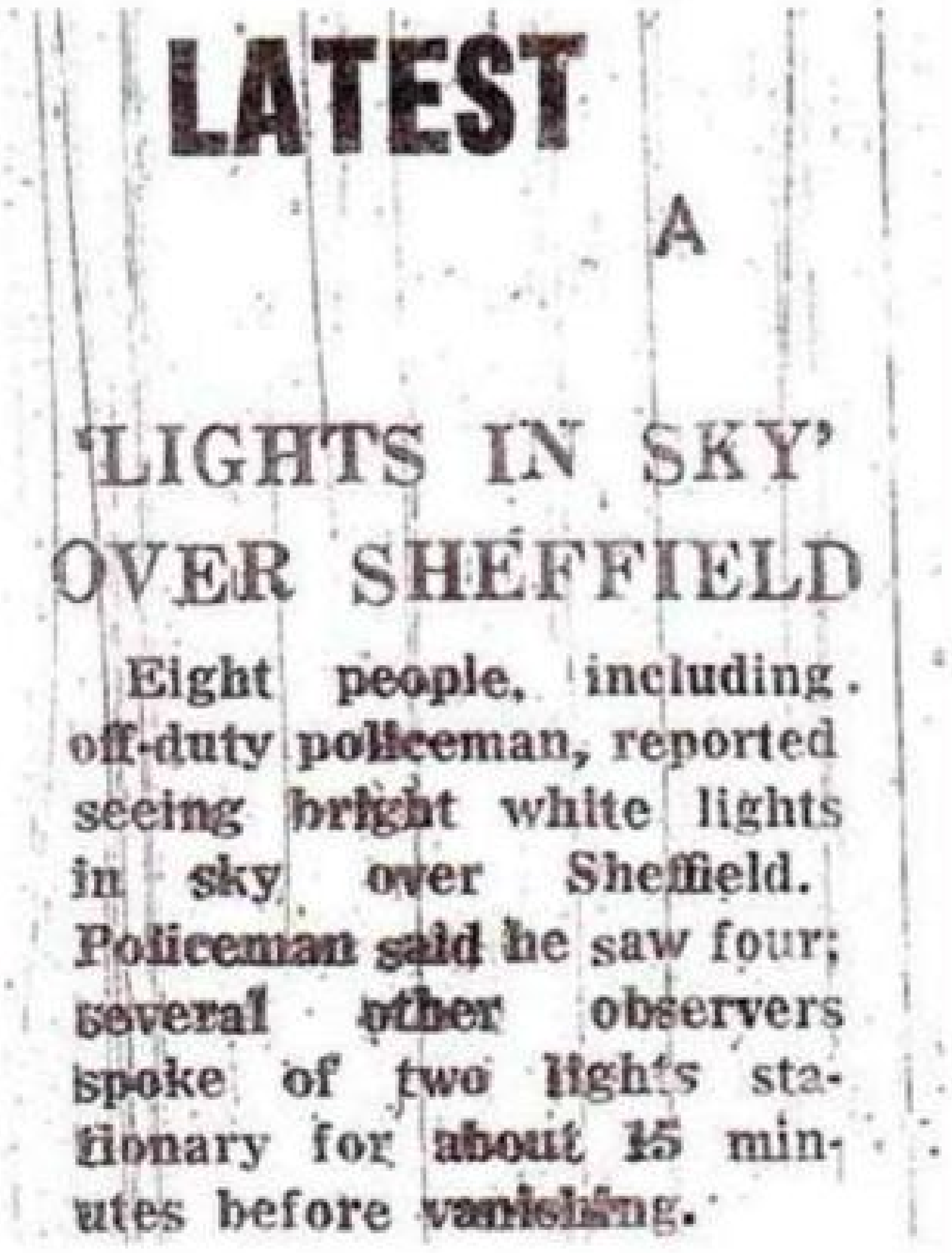
"Coming towards us from the opposite side of the park were two lights," he recalled. "The only way I can describe them is like Belisha beacons. The colours that were coming off were all the colours of the rainbow. But they were very, very soft and didn't throw beams like a torch. They were moving slowly, following the contours of the park."

The two lights appeared to be close, perhaps 20–30ft (6–9m) from the ground, but in the darkness it was impossible to judge their size and distance. Even more peculiar was the total silence. "There was no sound. I have worked nights hundreds of time. It was not a shooting star, steelworks lights, aircraft or anything like I had seen before."

At this point, his police training kicked in and, making sure he wasn't "seeing things", he asked Christine if she could see anything unusual. Her words were: "Yes, I was just going to ask you the same." It was now obvious she was alarmed and the poodle began barking and straining against its lead. Then, the lights appeared to move towards them, lifting upwards to hover above nearby rooftops. The dog then broke its lead and ran off towards its home – leaving Martyn and Christine standing in the darkness watching the lights in the sky.

"It was almost like we were being watched and it was deciding what to do next," he told us, 43 years later. "Then suddenly it became four lights in an oblong formation. But we could not see anything between them. It was just four lights pulsing different colours. Christine was terrified and wanted to go home, but I wanted to watch and see what happened.

DAVID CLARKE



LATEST

A

'LIGHTS IN SKY' OVER SHEFFIELD

Eight people, including . off-duty policeman, reported seeing bright white lights in sky over Sheffield. Policeman said he saw four; several other observers spoke of two lights stationary for about 15 minutes before vanishing.

ABOVE LEFT: The location on Logan Road, Sheffield, where PC Johnson saw his "UFO" in July 1968.
ABOVE RIGHT: The 'stop press' story published by the *Sheffield Morning Telegraph*, on 23 July 1968, just hours after the sightings.

Then, with no warning whatsoever, it was just like someone switched them off and it vanished at terrific speed, following the railway towards Rotherham. It just reminded me of how the TV used to switch off, like a receding dot. I was just left standing there thinking 'What the hell was that?'."

What happened next reads like a pre-run of Roy Neary's actions in the Spielberg film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, released a decade later. Determined to solve the mystery, PC Johnson rushed back to his police lodgings and roused a sleeping colleague from bed. Jumping into a patrol car, they combed the deserted city streets in search of the UFO but found nothing. They stopped at the city centre newspaper office where night reporter Peter Morris was working on the final edition of the *Sheffield Morning Telegraph*. He was fielding calls from other witnesses in the Sheffield and Rotherham area who had seen strange lights in the sky around midnight. Morris also called the nearby RAF base at Finningley, near Doncaster, and the Met Office station at Bawtry, but could find no obvious explanation.

These calls might help explain what happened next. Just a few hours later, after returning to bed, PC Johnson was woken by his landlady banging on the bedroom door. He had been ordered to report to his Superintendent's office at Sheffield Police HQ. "I realised this was serious stuff and wondered what the hell I had done wrong," he recalls. "I had to wear best uniform, march in and salute." The superintendent asked him if he had seen anything unusual at midnight and when PC Johnson said he had, he was asked why he hadn't reported it officially.

"It was only then I noticed two men sitting to his left," he told us. "They stuck in my mind because they were dressed just like the spies on TV, in trench-coats and Trilby hats. They were quite relaxed, just sat there and at first I thought they were from CID." He was reassured when his boss told him he wasn't in trouble and the two men were "members of a Government investigation department in London" who just wanted to interview him.

He was then asked to relate the night's events in some detail; one of the men asked questions while the other took notes. There were questions about the size of the lights and their distance, which he was unable to answer. He was asked about other witnesses and whether he read books about space travel. "There was no concern or pressure, it was all very relaxed, but the whole thing was so peculiar," he recalls. "But they were desperately trying to convince me that it was an aircraft or possibly a helicopter. They were stressing that, as if it was a get-out clause for them. But I wasn't having any of it."

OTHER WITNESSES IN THE SHEFFIELD AREA HAD SEEN STRANGE LIGHTS IN THE SKY

He told them about the behaviour of the dog and found they were very interested in this detail. When he asked them if this was relevant, one responded: "Well, quite possibly, because dogs can hear things that humans can't."

And this short interview was not the end. The mysterious duo reappeared the next day and returned with him to the spot on Logan Road where the UFO hovered. Later he was driven to a courtroom in the city centre. Here he met the two men again, along with another older man who he assumed was a magistrate. They reminded him that he was "under oath and was sworn to secrecy for 25 years".

Martyn Johnson was baffled by the secrecy because the story – including mention of police witnesses – had already made front-page news in the *Sheffield Telegraph*. The two men stayed in the city for three days, apparently tracing other witnesses, but oddly never interviewed Christine, Martyn's girlfriend. And on the day they were due to return to London, he bumped into them at the police station mess room. He took this opportunity to ask them what he had seen.

"They looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders," he said. "And one smiled and said to me – and his words are indelibly stamped on my memory all these years later – 'What you have seen is an unidentified flying object or UFO. Some people call them spaceships, and if the people of the world knew how many genuine sightings there were like yours, there would be total panic.'"

Now retired and finding unexpected fame as an author, Martyn Johnson still cannot understand what happened in the summer of '68. He told us: "When I thought about it, I thought how on Earth did those two men get from London to Sheffield in the space of a few hours? Even today they would have struggled to make that journey in that time. Who told them about it? How did they know?"

The answer may be provided by the contents of a slim file on PC Johnson's sighting preserved at The National Archives in Kew. His report was just one of 32 UFO reports received by S4 (Air), the MoD's UFO desk, in July 1968. It was one of two received from Sheffield on 22 July, with brief details listed on a standard UFO report form, which reads: "Four bright shining lights. No sound. Forming a square... [observer], off-duty policeman." All the reports in this file were copied to the RAF Strike Command and to DI55 which, as MoD have since admitted, occasionally made "extensive enquiries" of their own, investigations the UFO desk might know nothing about.

So what did PC Johnson see? A memo in the file notes that an aircraft from RAF Finningley was airborne that night, "on continuous training" from 8pm until shortly after midnight. Of the 280 UFO reports received by the government in 1968, almost half were attributed to aircraft and long experience shows that even trained observers can misperceive aircraft, particularly at night. But in this case, if the MoD were convinced this was a military aircraft on a night-flying exercise, why did they put so much effort into the investigation? For what was a pretty ordinary account of "lights in the sky", why did this report, out of thousands of others, require such urgent action and a lengthy visit by men from the ministry? Could PC Johnson have seen something on the 'secret list', or even as the DI55 investigators suggested, a 'spaceship'?

This is not an easy case to resolve one way or another. But for the MOD it was simple. On the cover of the file, an official has written an emphatic, "AIRCRAFT – NO FURTHER ACTION."

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

35 THE FABULOUS FLYING MEN OF 1880, PART 1

THEO PAIJMANS follows a trail of 19th-century New York newspapers in an attempt to find the truth behind the batman of Coney Island that never was...

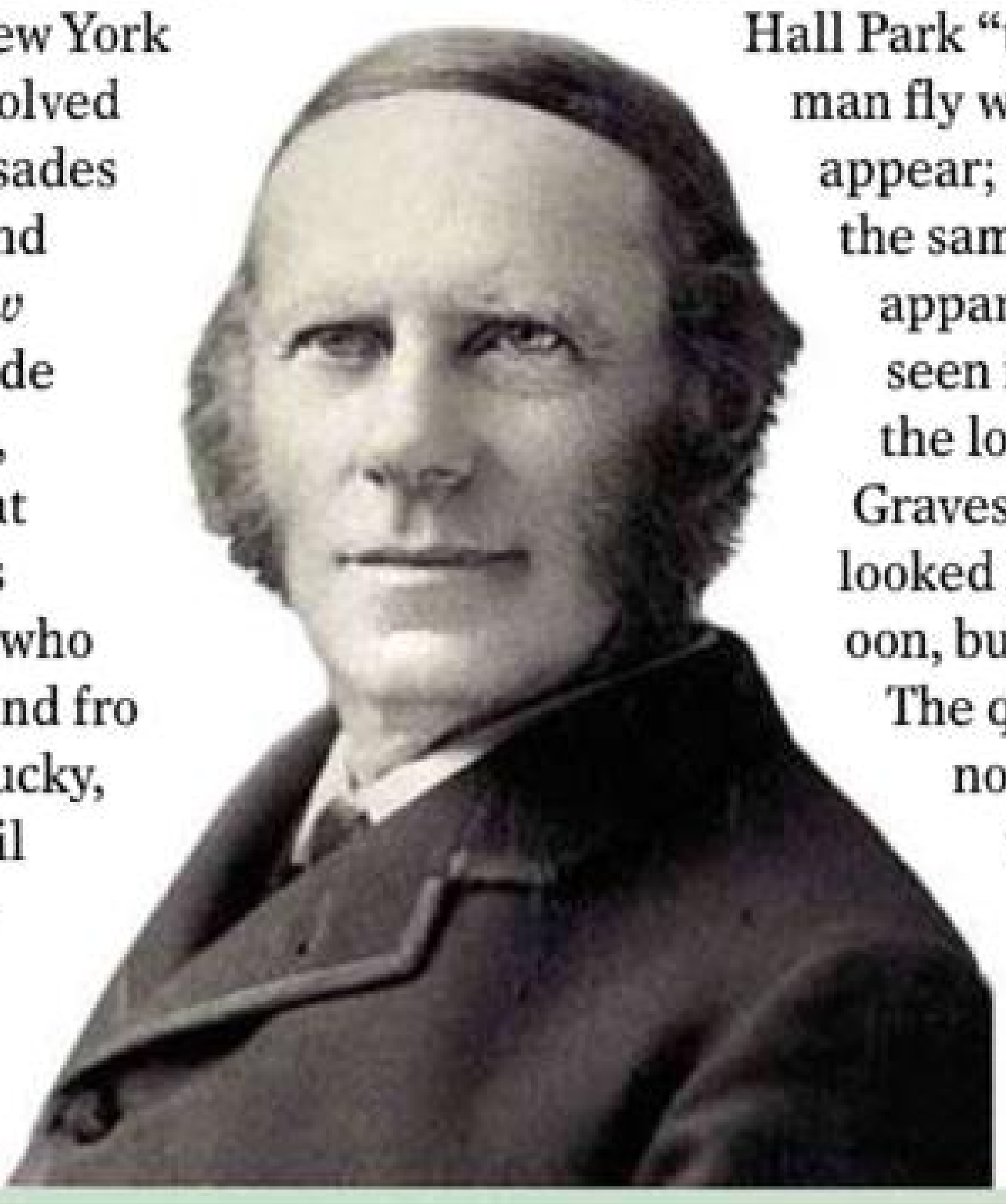
On 12 September 1880, the *New York Times* published a puzzling account about how, in the previous week, something very strange was seen flying near Coney Island. It was spotted cruising at a height of 1,000ft (300m), on its way towards the New Jersey coast. The thing resembled a man with batlike wings and "improved frog's legs". Notwithstanding the great height, "the face of the man could be distinctly seen, and it wore a cruel and determined expression. The movements made by the object closely resembled those of a frog in the act of swimming with his hind legs and flying with his front legs… When we add that this monster waved his wings in answer to the whistle of a locomotive, and was of a deep black colour, the alarming nature of the apparition can be imagined. The object was seen by many reputable persons, and they all agree that it was a man engaged in flying toward New Jersey," the account ran.[1]

It also spoke of similar sightings in the air above St Louis and over Kentucky, before ending with some light-hearted satire regarding Reverend Thomas De Witt Talmage (below), who at that time lived in Brooklyn and had been born in New Jersey. Talmage was at the time a well-known reformer in New York City, often involved in various crusades against vice and crime. The *New York Times* made fun of his zeal, suggesting that perhaps it was the Reverend who was flying to and fro as far as Kentucky, rooting out evil and sin.[2] The account was republished nationwide in a number of other American newspapers.[3]

> "It was black and more resembled an immense bug in appearance than anything else. It had four legs, operated by the occupant with a motion much like that of a turtle when swimming."

This account of a batman flying over Coney Island, and the other sightings from St Louis and Kentucky, entered fortean lore and have been cited in many a book, article and website ever since.[4] But did a bat-winged man really fly over Coney Island?

The answer to this question can be found by following a trail through some New York newspapers in the first week of September 1880. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* was silent about any weird aerial occurrences, despite publishing other news about Coney Island in the relevant timeframe. It did remark, though, that on 1 September an unnamed "Professor" had proposed to fly from the top of the Brooklyn City Hall to the opposite rooftops, and, as he said, "to hover in the air by the aid of a new machine he has invented."[5] The day arrived, and some 2,000–3,000 spectators had gathered around the City Hall Park "to see a man fly who didn't appear; but about the same time an apparition was seen in the air in the lower part of Gravesend, which looked like a balloon, but wasn't. The question now arises whether there is a successor to John Wise [the pioneering American balloonist]."[6]



The *New York World* not only mentioned the flying man who wasn't there but quoted another Brooklyn newspaper, the *Argus*, and this is where it gets interesting. It elaborated on what the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* had briefly called "an apparition", seen high in the air over nearby Gravesend:

"A report that a man in a flying-machine would fly from the top of the Brooklyn City Hall at 3pm yesterday drew a crowd of thousands of persons to the neighbourhood. A little after 3, William McConnell, a telegraph lineman, went up on the roof of the City Hall to adjust a wire, and being mistaken for the flying man did all he could to keep up the illusion by occasionally waving his arms and kicking at the wide, wide world. It was 5 o'clock before the crowd concluded to go home. Meanwhile the Brooklyn Argus *had discovered a flying man at Gravesend and had done him up in this style: 'A queer-looking object passed over the southerly end of the village yesterday afternoon, about a thousand feet or so up in the air. The time was 5.15 o'clock, and the object was evidently a flying machine operated by a man. It was not at all like a balloon, and not more than one-fourth of the size of an ordinary balloon. It was black and more resembled an immense bug in appearance than anything else. It had four arms, or legs, which were operated by the occupant with a motion very much like that of a turtle when swimming. The operation of the arms had the effect to cause the machine to move somewhat across the current of the wind, so that while the wind was blowing from the southeast the machine was making a westerly course, and looked as if it would pass on the south side of Staten Island or across to Keyport, N.J., provided it did not make land or fall in the water before it reached that point. Sometimes the machine would roll as if it would turn over completely, but it did not. The face of the occupant could be seen looking down from the forepart of the machine and it looked as though he was in the position of a person swimming, with the machine above him and fastened close to his body. Just as he passed the point where the New York and Brighton Beach Railroad passes over the Prospect Park and Coney Island Railroad, a train on the latter road came along and the engineer blew his whistle, to which the flying man responded by flapping his arms vigorously.'*

"More than a month ago, a similar story of a flying machine was published in the Louisville Courier-Journal. *The queer object was described on the authority of a druggist of that city of good character for veracity. He said he called the attention of several bystanders to it, and they corroborated his account. Reports of the machine were also received from several points in the interior of Kentucky under circumstances that excluded the idea of collusion."*[7]

So here we have the source of the flying whatsit that wasn't seen over Coney Island but over Gravesend. But what was that strange object resembling "an immense bug" with a man in it? The answer was given in the New York newspaper the *Sun*. This paper had become quite famous in the 1830s for having published, in several instalments, Locke's infamous "Moon Hoax" with, amongst others, its batwinged lunar inhabitants. Later, in 1877, it published a letter by a William H Smith of Brooklyn in which the writer confessed to having seen "an angel" flying in the heavens.[8]

As the story in the *Sun* ran: *"An aerial machine was seen flying over Gravesend, L.I., on Wednesday afternoon. When first observed, it was high in the air and several who saw it declared that there was a man working the machinery. It gradually descended, however, and was finally captured by some boys near the Gravesend station. Flagman Thomas McCarthy, Mr Rump of Gravesend and Richard Smith, who saw it descend, say there was no man in the machine, but that it was of peculiar construction, and had flapping wings. Some compared its motion to that of a porpoise and said that it rolled over and over. Others thought it looked like a man swimming in the air. Mr Rump says it was very much like some of the fire balloons that have been sent up from Coney Island. The boys were delighted with their prize.*

"A notice appeared in some of the papers yesterday, copied from a Brooklyn paper of Wednesday, that a 'Professor' proposed to fly from the top of the Brooklyn City Hall to the opposite roofs at 3 o'clock yesterday. The notice caused great excitement yesterday afternoon about the Brooklyn City Hall. As early as 2 o'clock, street cars which centre there began to deposit men, women and boys in front of the City Hall place, who at once took positions.

"William McConnell, a police telegraph lineman, who went upon the roof of the City Hall to adjust some telegraph wires, thrilled the spectators with excitement as he pranced about in imitation of a man who was going to fly. He went to the edge of the roof, spread out his arms, and as he made a swimming motion, the women held their breath, and the small boys cried. 'There he goes'. But McConnell, having worked up the throng to the fever heat of expectation, retired. A woman who went out upon the roof to see if her clothes upon the line were dry was cheered and asked to fly.

"The throng steadily increased for two hours and at 4 o'clock obstructed the sidewalks in every direction. At 5 o'clock it began to dawn upon the minds of the spectators that the announcement was all a hoax, and an hour later the throng had vanished."[9]

All these newspapers covered the incidents more than a week before the publication of the canonical article in the *New York Times*. As is clear from this paper trail, the flying batwinged man of Coney Island never was. Something was seen over nearby Gravesend and, thought by some to be a man working some kind of flying device, upon crashing there it turned out to be a manmade construction, balloon- or kite-like, but unmanned.

The Coney Island flying man was a spoof thought up by an anonymous writer for the *New York Times* with some added satirical lines on Rev. Talmage, perhaps the primary object of the article. The ingredients of the spoof consisted of reports of an object over Gravesend that looked like a man flying in the air, but that upon crashing proved to be a manmade object; an anonymous person who announced a demonstration with a novel aircraft but who never showed up at Brooklyn (and perhaps he was the inventor of what crashed down at Gravesend); a very modern-sounding suggestion of fire balloons at Coney Island; and allusions to similar sightings at Louisville and St Louis; the ultimate origin of the hoax being the article in the Brooklyn *Argus* in which it was proclaimed that the flying, flapping aeroform was steered by a human pilot.

It is perhaps for this reason that Fort does not mention the Coney Island flying man in his œuvre. He does mention the sightings at St Louis and Louisville and writes that he first read about these in the New York newspapers. The Coney Island batman tale, therefore, could not have escaped his scrutiny, yet the hoaxed sighting is absent from all of his books, which suggests he was aware of the deceitful nature of the story.[10] Having been fascinated by the flying batman of Coney Island for many years, I am satisfied – and a bit disappointed – that this tale has now been laid to rest. But does it end here? Not exactly. The similar sighting at Louisville has been accounted for and also has been republished many times, beginning with Fort in *Lo!*. It is the mystery of what had happened at St Louis, and which remained undiscovered for more than a century, which steers us in another, surprising direction.

To be continued…

CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

NOTES

[1] "An Aerial Mystery", *New York Times*, 12 Sept 1880. The original account can be freely downloaded as a pdf file here: http://bit.ly/vHaAQ2.

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_De_Witt_Talmage.

[3] "An Aerial Mystery", *Fitchburg Sentinel*, Fitchburg, Massachusetts, 14 Sept; *News and Observer*, Raleigh, North Carolina, 15 Sept; *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, Little Rock, Arkansas, 18 Sept 1880.

[4] With regard to when the Coney Island flying man entered 20th-century Fortlore, since Fort didn't mention it, a very early republication was undertaken by fortean researcher Chuck Flood in "Strange Happenings", *National Enquirer*, 4 May 1969. Loren Coleman informed me that John Keel included it in his 1970 book *Strange Creatures From Time and Space*. Keel wrote the book in 1968–1969. The Coney Island account is found in chapter 17, "The Man-Birds". The Coney Island flying man also was part of the "Winged Weirdies" article by Loren Coleman and Jerry Clark in *Fate* magazine, March 1972. Fortean researcher Ray Nelke, who assembled an index to *Fate*, checked the issues before that date on my behalf but came up with no further results. Opinion is that the early forteans rediscovered and shared the account in the 1960s.

[5] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1 Sept 1880.

[6] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 3 Sept 1880.

[7] "Somebody Flying Around, A Buglike Apparition in the Air at Gravesend and a Humbug at the Brooklyn City Hall", *New York World*, 3 Sept 1880. The story referred to as published in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* is: "A Flying Machine", *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 29 July 1880. A follow-up was posted in the same newspaper on 6 Aug 1880 headed "The Flying Machine".

[8] "Was It An Angel?", *Sun*, 21 Sept 1877. Also published in *Cherokee Advocate*, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 3 Oct 1877. Refutation in "A Cloudy Angel", *Deseret Evening News*, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2 Oct 1877. Briefly and jokingly referred to in *Evening Telegram*, New York, 21 Sept 1877. Smith's alleged sighting is also mentioned in Fort.

[9] "Flying Over Gravesend, An Aerial Machine that Some Boys Captured – An Old Hoax In Brooklyn, *Sun*, New York, 3 Sept 1880.

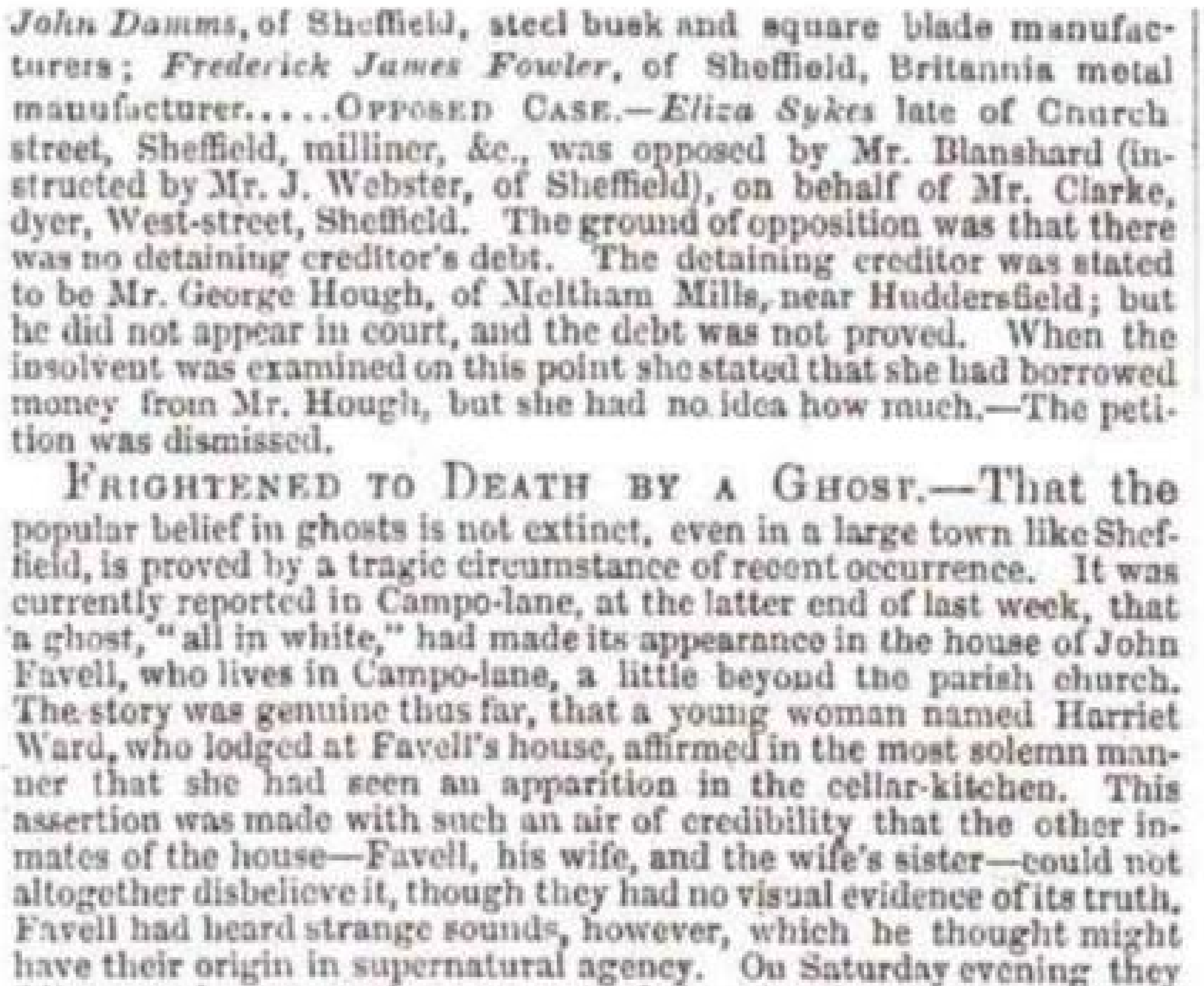
[10] Charles Fort: *The Complete Books Of Charles Fort*, Dover, 1974, *Lo!*, ch12, pp640–641. I have checked and double-checked this, presuming that Fort had mentioned this sighting. I had kind assistance in this matter from Bob Rickard, Chris Aubeck, Chuck Flood and Ray Nelke.

Scared to Death

Were supernatural forces at work in Yorkshire in 1855 – with fatal consequences? **DAVID CLARKE** unearths the story of a Sheffield woman who died "from fright" following an encounter with a ghost. Was this truly a case of death by supernatural causes?

In the hard winter of 1855, the population of Sheffield was gripped by news that a woman had been scared to death by an apparition that some believed was the Devil himself. Her death occurred in the most bizarre circumstances and sparked a mini-riot outside the haunted premises. The mayhem followed news reports of an inquest held on the body of the dead woman, Hannah Rallison, at a town centre public house on 27 February. At the inquest, evidence was heard that Rallison died from fright after seeing a lady in white appear at midnight in a rented property on Campo Lane near the parish church (now Sheffield Cathedral).

In 1855, Sheffield was a modest-sized town, with a population of 160,000. Since the Middle Ages, it had been known for fine cutlery and silverware, and with the Industrial Revolution in full swing, the growing steel-making industry required coal, water and a large workforce. During the 19th century, the population increased by a factor of 10, with disastrous effects on the environment. The new city centre, which sits in a natural bowl surrounded by seven hills, was frequently covered by thick smog, and the River Don became one of the most polluted rivers in Europe. Many working class Sheffielders lived in overcrowded and insanitary back-to-back slum housing, and in 1832 hundreds died in a cholera epidemic. Campo Lane already had an eerie reputation before the events of 1855. Early engravings and photographs show rows of crowded tenements backing onto the north side of the parish church. Journalist and poet John Holland described hearing those harbingers of doom, the Gabriel Hounds, here one night in 1861 (see panel). The lane itself was haunted by a barghast (a ghostly dog) and a writer in 1832 noted: "a large stone house was untenanted a many years when I was a boy because say'd report in those days it was haunted and no one durst live in it".[1]



John Damms, of Sheffield, steel busk and square blade manufacturers; *Frederick James Fowler*, of Sheffield, Britannia metal manufacturer.....OPPOSED CASE.—*Eliza Sykes* late of Church street, Sheffield, milliner, &c., was opposed by Mr. Blanshard (instructed by Mr. J. Webster, of Sheffield), on behalf of Mr. Clarke, dyer, West-street, Sheffield. The ground of opposition was that there was no detaining creditor's debt. The detaining creditor was stated to be Mr. George Hough, of Meltham Mills, near Huddersfield; but he did not appear in court, and the debt was not proved. When the insolvent was examined on this point she stated that she had borrowed money from Mr. Hough, but she had no idea how much.—The petition was dismissed.

FRIGHTENED TO DEATH BY A GHOST.—That the popular belief in ghosts is not extinct, even in a large town like Sheffield, is proved by a tragic circumstance of recent occurrence. It was currently reported in Campo-lane, at the latter end of last week, that a ghost, "all in white," had made its appearance in the house of John Favell, who lives in Campo-lane, a little beyond the parish church. The story was genuine thus far, that a young woman named Harriet Ward, who lodged at Favell's house, affirmed in the most solemn manner that she had seen an apparition in the cellar-kitchen. This assertion was made with such an air of credibility that the other inmates of the house—Favell, his wife, and the wife's sister—could not altogether disbelieve it, though they had no visual evidence of its truth. Favell had heard strange sounds, however, which he thought might have their origin in supernatural agency. On Saturday evening they felt so much concerned on account of the ghostly presence that for the sake of greater security a friend of the family, a man named Robert Rollinson, who lodges in Court No. 24, South-street, Park, was requested to spend the night at Favell's house. Being neither superstitious nor timid, Rollinson acquiesced. He and the other persons went to bed in due time, and Rollinson reported on the Sunday morning that he had seen nothing extraordinary, but towards morning had heard a strange noise that he could not account for. He returned home to breakfast, having first received an invitation for himself and wife to dine with the Favells. His wife and the family whom they lodged with were very inquisitive about the ghost, but Rollinson as-

The mayhem followed news of an inquest held on the body of a dead woman

Henry Pawson's *Sheffield Times* was one of four weekly Sheffield newspapers that devoted considerable space to the Campo Lane ghost, and I have reconstructed the story from the detailed contemporary reports by journalists. The story is complex and it is important to obtain as complete a picture as possible of the key personalities involved.

The woman who died from fright is identified by all the contemporary sources as Hannah Rollinson. However, her death certificate, held at Sheffield's Registry office, gives her surname as *Rallison*. Hannah was 48 years old. She was the wife of labourer John Rallison and they rented a room in the Park district of the town. Like many other working class Victorians, Hannah's life had been touched by grief. Only a year before, the couple's eldest son had been killed in a Sheffield pit accident. Virtually nothing else is known about Hannah and John except for the fact that

PHOTO: DAVID NEWTON/ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Campo Lane.
OLD A
AND BITTER

SHEFFIELD CITY LIBRARIES

LEFT AND BELOW: Two views of Campo Lane as it appeared at the end of the 19th century.

both were members of a new religious sect, the Church of Latter Day Saints, or Mormons (see panel).

A short time before Hannah's death, she was introduced by a fellow Mormon, John Favell, to a young woman called Harriet Ward. Hannah had no way of knowing that this fateful meeting would lead to her own death, but Ward played a central role in the tragedy that subsequently unfolded. She was evidently someone blessed with what Charles Fort described as "wild talents". A writer in the *Sheffield Independent* said of her: "Of all the young women we have come in contact with for many a day, not one appears to us so likely to see a ghost as Ward, about whose appearance and demeanour there is a wildness indicative of an uncommon exuberance of imagination." [2]

When in February 1855 Favell, along with his wife and her sister, rented a house in Campo Lane, they brought Ward with them as a lodger. The property consisted of a first-floor shop and a cellar kitchen. Like the Rallisons, Ward's life had been touched by loss. Her journeyman husband had died some years earlier, leaving her homeless until the Favells took her in. We don't know how Ward's husband died, but newspaper accounts reveal that she received frequent visitations from his ghost. She was also a convert to Spiritualism and had heard "spirit rappings". Evidently, Ward was a medium before the phrase was widely used in England (see panel). Early in February, she was "induced" by John Favell, of whom she appeared to have been overly fond, to join the Mormon congregation. But her conversion would be a short one.

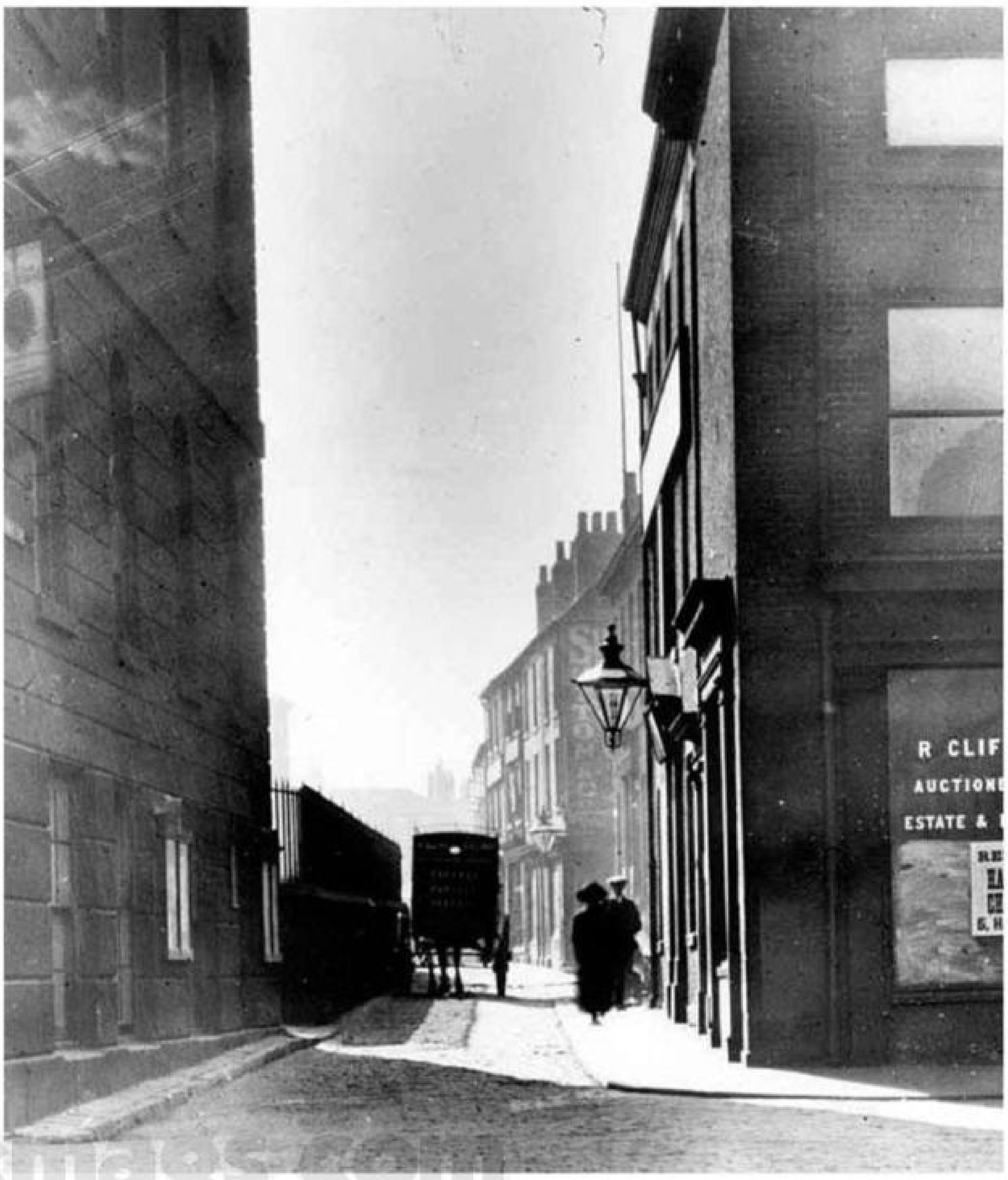
Ward declared she could see the ghost on the cellar steps

THE THING IN THE CELLAR

"…this ghost story is one of the prettiest we have heard for some time… It has appeared to three persons. The first it alarmed; the second it threw into fits; and the third it killed. What more can be needed to convince the most sceptical?" – Henry Pawson, *Sheffield Times.* [3]

Immediately on moving into Campo Lane, the Favells were disturbed during the night by "strange sounds which might have their origin in supernatural agency". They sounded "like someone stealing softly upstairs, and a rapping in the garret as though someone was stamping gently with the foot". Then, early one morning, John Favell was on his way to work at Sheffield canal wharf when he saw the outline of a human figure in white, framed in the window of the cellar kitchen. Fearing burglars had broken in, he rushed back but found nothing in the room except a broken pitcher. On hearing his story, the family "set it down as the effects of the imagination". Nevertheless, they grew so fearful that none would venture downstairs after dark. No one, that is, apart from Harriet Ward. She appeared to show no fear of ghosts; in fact she wanted to meet one.

And so at midnight on Saturday 24 February, Ward entered the cellar on an errand, clutching a lighted candle. Within seconds, a loud scream was heard and the Favells rushed downstairs to find her leaning against a table, her features rigid, her eyes fixed upon the mantelpiece. "There!" she exclaimed, pointing at the



SHEFFIELD CITY LIBRARIES

mantelpiece, "don't you see it?" But the couple saw nothing. Ward then came out of her trance and fainted into Favell's arms. On recovery, she described the ghost as a grim-featured old woman wearing a long white nightgown and a "full-bordered cap". After this experience, Ward began to see the ghost frequently – in all, five times during the next 24 hours. And in a dream that night, the ghost led Ward to "a purse of gold", buried under the flagstones of the cellar floor. In her dream, Favell took out the purse and said: "That's all we want, let the old ghost come now."

Ward's visions continued on the Sunday, when John and Hannah Rallison and their landlady, Mrs Johnson, visited to lunch with the Favells. As they watched in amazement, Ward declared she could see the ghost on the cellar steps, displaying bloodstains around its face and neck. Her screams brought John Favell running down the steps, at which point his feet appeared to touch the ghost's head. But, again, he saw nothing. Ward said the ghost appeared to kneel in a corner of the cellar, precisely where she had dreamed of buried treasure, before melting away.

Turning to the Mormons for answers, Favell, Rallison and Ward attended a church meeting at the Hall of Science, where the ghost became the main topic of conversation. Later in the afternoon, they returned to Campo Lane with a large group of friends, including several Mormon elders. By this point, Ward's dream of buried treasure had become entwined with the belief that the ghostly old woman was a restless spirit, perhaps one of several people buried beneath the house. As one journalist remarked: "Of course, there could be no ghost without a murder… and therefore all the gossips have declared that the white lady's aim is to obtain a Christian burial and bring to justice, if still living, the perpetrators of the crime." [4]

Favell and his Mormon friends were so convinced by Ward's story they began to uproot flagstones from the floor of the cellar. They dug deep into the earth in search of the purse of gold, but found nothing. Meanwhile, a small crowd of neighbours began to gather in the street outside, peering in through the cellar window. What happened next was described in proceedings at the inquest presided over by Sheffield coroner Henry Badger.

"FRIGHTENED TO DEATH BY A GHOST" [*SHEFFIELD TIMES*, 3 MARCH 1855]

Badger was told that as midnight approached a group of 20 people, including Ward, the Favells and the Rallisons, gathered in the first floor shop. Annoyed by the growing crowd outside, Mrs Favell asked her sister to cover the window of the cellar with a blind. Fearing what she might see on the cellar steps, she hesitated; but Hannah Rallison exclaimed "what a lot of nonsense, give me the blind" and went downstairs, accompanied by her landlady, Mrs Johnson. As Hannah began fixing the blind, she heard someone joke that "If the ghost comes down the steps, it will take you first." At that precise moment, she turned around to face the steps and was immediately seized by terror. Clasping the arm of her friend, she shouted: "Oh, Mrs Johnson, I saw something on the steps! Take me away!" Then she collapsed and had to be carried out of the cellar by the menfolk.

According to the *Sheffield Independent* account, Hannah temporarily regained consciousness for a brief interval, during which she said she "had seen a female form dressed in white, on the stairs; that it seemed to approach her suddenly, became a substance without form, and vanished as it rushed past her". [5] As the drama continued in the upstairs room, Harriet Ward suddenly exclaimed that she could see the ghost again at the top of the stairs. This time, the mysterious old lady opened her nightdress to reveal deep gashes in its neck and blood-stained clothes. Challenged in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost to say why it troubled her, the figure made no reply but beckoned for Ward to follow. Gripped by "some irresistible urge", she descended the steps while Favell, "struck by her wild, terrified appearance, took hold of her arm", and followed her down. Ward said the ghost again disappeared once more into the corner of the cellar.

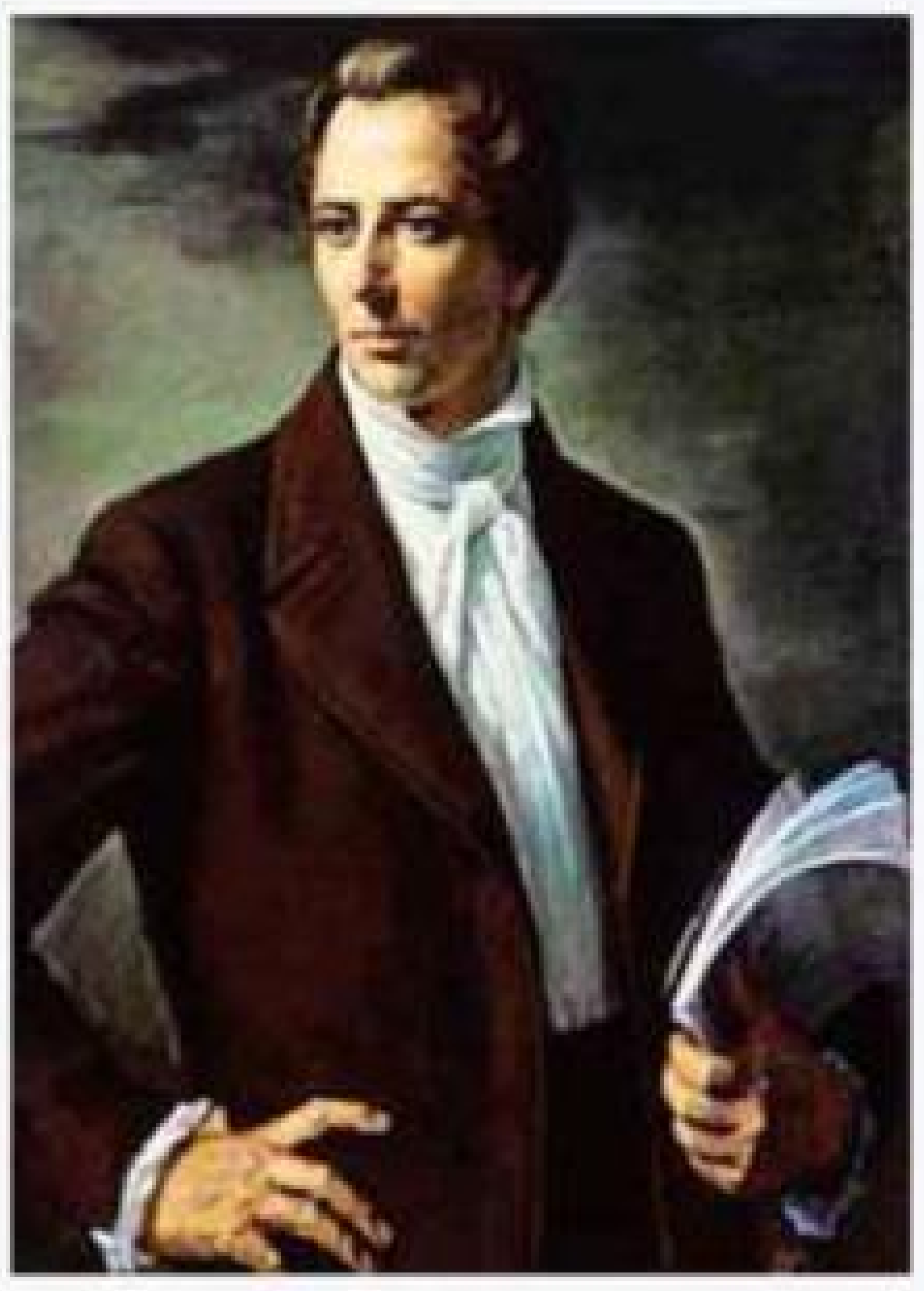
This was far from the end of the story. As Hannah Rallison lay semiconscious in the shop, Ward lapsed into a trance and began to communicate with the spirit that only she could see. She demanded, "Why do you trouble me?" and this time received an answer, although not an audible one. The ghost produced a sheet of paper on which the words "I am murdered" appeared. Ward asked, "By whom?" And as more questions spilled out of Ward's mouth, more words appeared on the paper, "the letters of one answer fading as another made its appearance". For upwards of an hour, she dictated the spirit's messages as the Mormons copied them down. Like many other spirit messages, the information was banal and contradictory. Speaking through Ward, the ghost claimed it was the restless soul of Elizabeth Johnson, murdered by her nephew, William Dawson, on 26 March 1722 and buried deep beneath the cellar "in a watery grave". There was one final message: "The garret and the cellar are now marked with my blood. You must quit this house, because

RAPPING SPIRITS AND LATTER DAY SAINTS

Modern spiritualism was founded in 1848 by the Fox sisters following an outbreak of "spirit rapping" at the farmhouse where they lived in Hydesville, New York. With death a frequent visitor to 19th-century households, supernatural beliefs provided an important social function not recognised by organised religion. Those who wanted to believe looked to science to provide proof of life after death and leading scientists of the day, such as Sir William Crookes, were convinced that communication with the spirit world was possible.

While the Church of England rejected ghosts as delusions or works of the devil, ordinary people continued to believe in them. Spiritualism provided an outlet for those who had lost faith in the rituals of the Church and a means of direct communication with the other world. The movement spread quickly to Britain in the 1850s. Like Mormonism, it quickly took root in the crowded industrial towns and cities in northern England. The short-lived *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, founded in Bradford, Yorkshire, in 1853, contained reports of "extraordinary communications from the spirit world". Mediums, frequently young women from the lower classes like Harriet Ward, found social status and income acting as direct intermediaries for the spirits. The medium Florence Cook (and her spirit guide 'Katie King'), who achieved fame and social status as a teenager in the 1870s, is one of the best known examples (**FT179:30–37**).

In 1855, the editor of the *Sheffield Independent* told his readers that the Campo Lane story could be accounted for as "a specimen of Mormon credulity". All the key players, he wrote, belonged to the Church of Latter Day Saints, "among whom the belief in ghosts and apparitions is prevalent". The hostility expressed by the establishment towards the sect was also seen in attempts by the police to break up meetings of Mormons in the city. The Mormon church was founded by American visionary Joseph Smith (left) in 1830, and within 20 years the church had more than 30,000 members in England. Smith was a treasure hunter who was visited one night in 1823 in his bedroom by an angel with a luminous face. The angel directed him to dig at a location near his home in Palmyra, New York, where he would find a set of gold plates. He unearthed the plates four years later and the script, when deciphered, became the Book of Mormon, regarded by the church as a prehistory of Christianity in the Americas. Did Smith's discovery provide the inspiration for Harriet Ward's dream of buried treasure in Campo Lane?



William [Dawson] will trouble you if you don't."[6]

The impromptu séance ended with the abrupt disappearance of the white lady, "whereupon [Ward] fainted and remained insensible for about a quarter of an hour". Meanwhile, John Rallison was helping neighbours carry his unconscious wife to a horse-drawn cab. She was taken to her home in South Street, where she died the following afternoon. At the inquest, the jury questioned a number of those who had witnessed the extraordinary scenes in Campo Lane, including John Favell and Harriet Ward. They concluded there were "no suspicious circumstances" and returned a verdict of death through natural causes. Rallison was described by the coroner as "a strong, healthy woman, labouring under no disease as far as is known" but her death had "certainly been caused by the fright she had received on the previous day, up to which time she was in perfect health and spirits". Hannah's death certificate records the cause as "...sudden death in a fit *believed to have been brought on by fright*".[7]

The death of Hannah Rallison was the final straw for the Favell family. Along with the occupants of four neighbouring tenements, they abandoned the rented property and found refuge elsewhere. Although the white lady was not seen again, the rumours could not be easily exorcised. Hundreds now believed the foundations of the house contained the bodies of one, possibly two, murder victims and a hoard of treasure. Following news reports of the inquest, the street outside the boarded-up shops swelled with curious people. On the evening of Tuesday 6 March, a crowd of 300 gathered, blocking movement on the road outside. Windows were broken, lead was stolen from the roof and an outhouse demolished. One group, their courage fuelled by drink, broke into the haunted property and began hauling up flagstones. Pickpockets joined the melée and, after several bystanders were robbed, a force of six policemen were called for. As they tried to clear the road, the mood grew angry, and two were left badly injured in the street battle that followed.

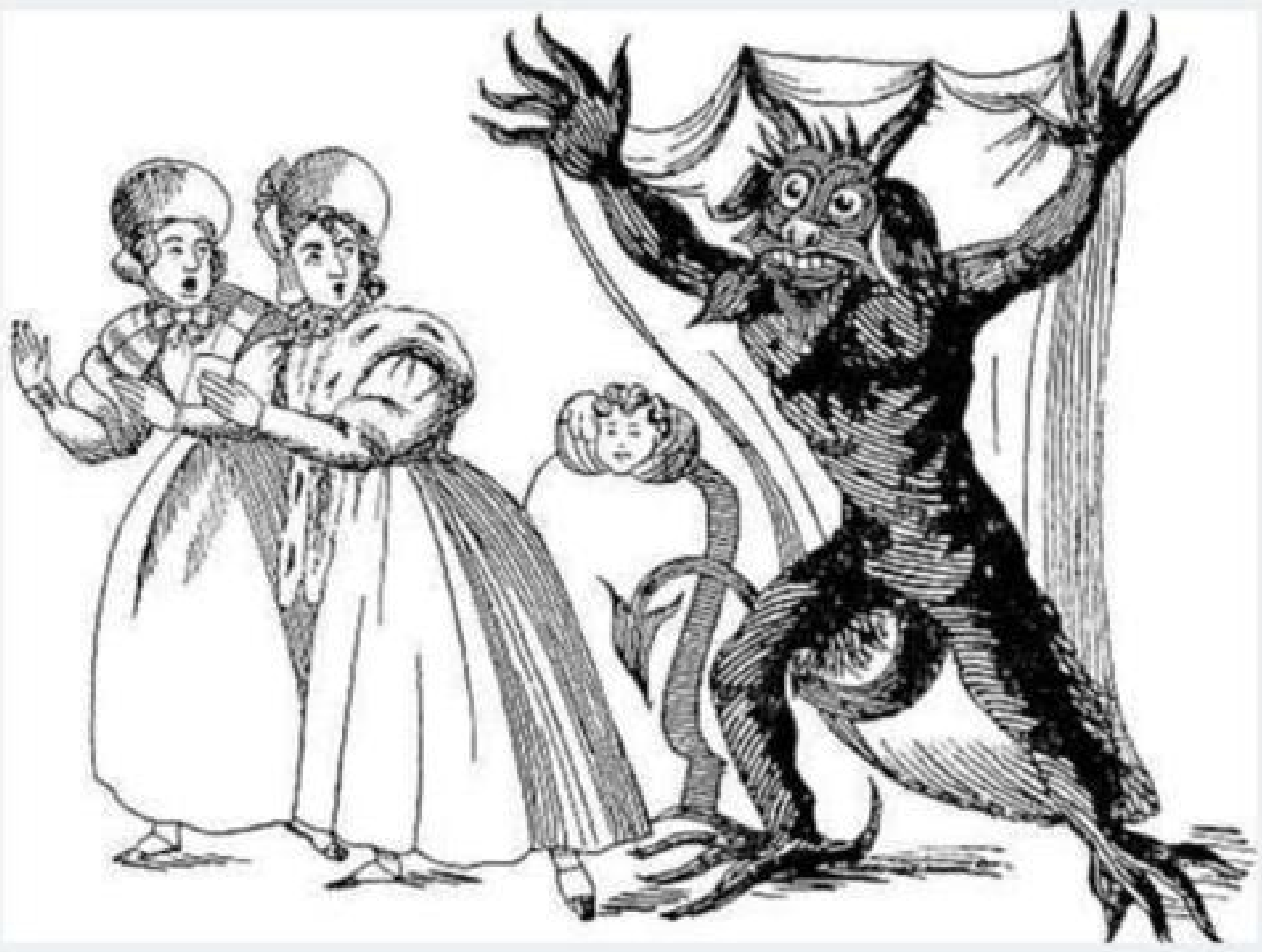
THE CAMPO LANE DELUSION?

Street violence was no stranger to Sheffield, which saw anti-government riots in 1840, but these had been triggered by the editors of the town's radical newspapers, one of whom kept a loaded revolver on his desk. The owners of the *Sheffield Free Press* and *Independent* did not believe in ghosts and did not want to see property damaged and law-abiding people injured by those who did. The papers were scathing in their criticism of the "delusions" of the believers and directed most of their fire upon the "credulous Mormonites" they blamed for the mayhem in Campo Lane. Nevertheless, the liberal *Free Press* was forced to admit, "[T]he parties concerned in this affair whom we have seen solemnly affirm

VERDICT: DEATH BY SUPERNATURAL CAUSES

In 1793, Rev. E Gillespy wrote that "Nothing can affect the human mind with greater terror than the dread of an interview with the souls of deceased persons." The expression "you look as if you have seen a ghost" is still used to describe people who appear pale and shocked. Today, TV programmes such as *Most Haunted* play on the desire to be entertained and frightened – but only up to a point. In previous centuries, people actually died while taking part in rowdy ghost-hunts. Ghost scares were a popular form of urban entertainment for the working classes in Victorian England. Large crowds gathered quickly outside haunted houses and excitement was fuelled by gossip and rumour. Pranksters, usually young men impersonating ghosts, were a frequent source of such mayhem. Sheffield and other industrial cities played host to ghost scares. In 1881, over 1,000 gathered outside a suburban house in Pearl Street, Sharrow Vale, after "spirit rappings" were heard. As the crowds surged forward, a middle-aged woman dropped dead. It was later found she had succumbed "to apoplexy... as a result of excitement and fright".

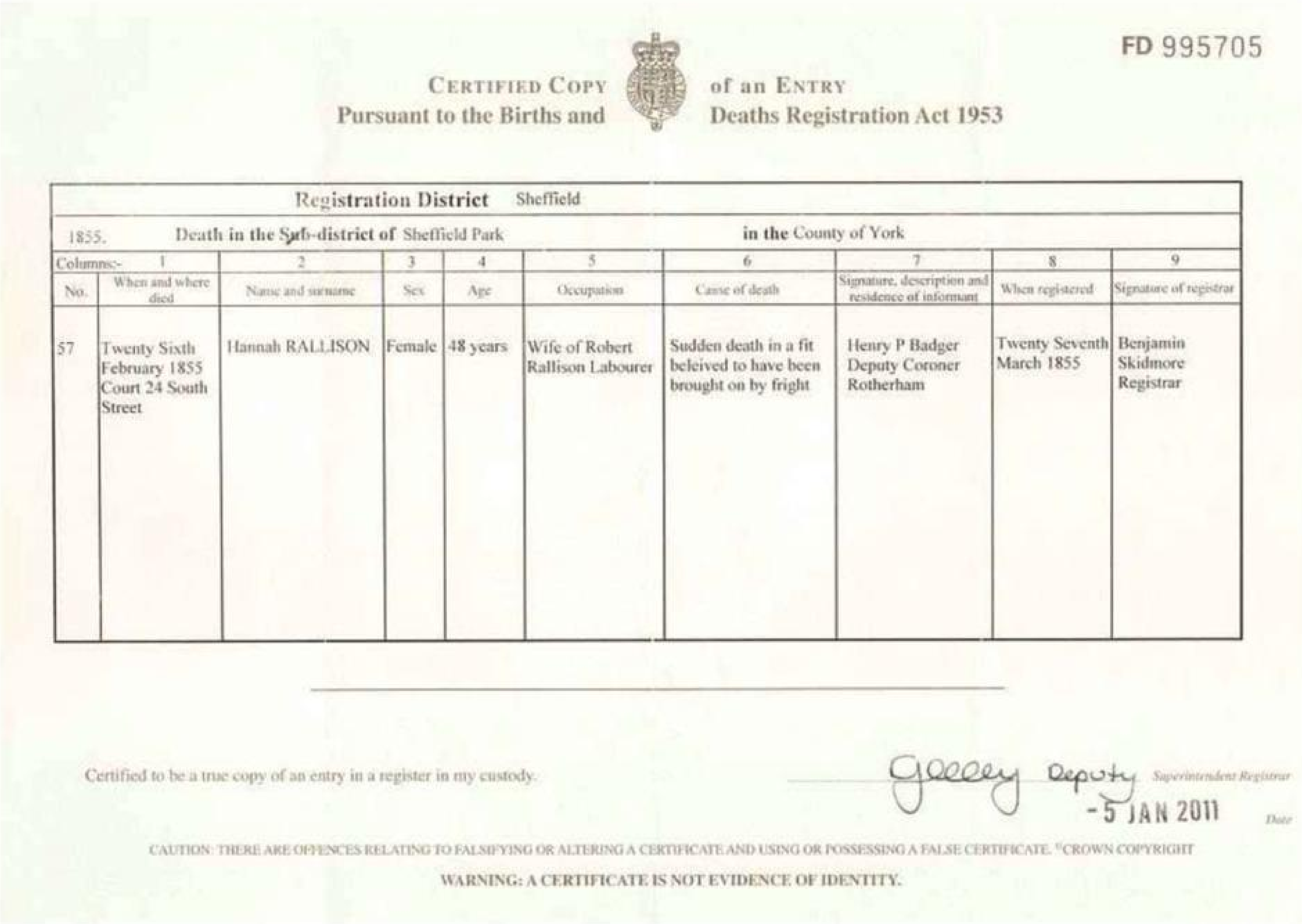
Inquest juries occasionally recorded fright as either a contributor to or the actual cause of death, as in the case of Hannah Rallison. This was a period before underlying medical conditions such as heart disease were fully understood. In some rare cases, deaths from fright were attributed to supernatural beings. The Gabriel Hounds in particular were feared as harbingers of death. The phantom hunt was heard, but not seen, as strange yelping sounds emanating from the night sky during the winter months. In 1870, an inquest was held regarding the body of a man found by the banks of the River Yealm on Dartmoor. Unable to find any obvious cause of death, the jurors decided the man must have been "struck down by the phantom hunt". So certain were they of this explanation that the coroner had great difficulty in persuading them to return a verdict of accidental death rather than the one they preferred, "death by supernatural agency".



The most fearsome bugbear of the Victorian era was Spring-heeled Jack, part ghost and part mystery assailant (pictured above). The leaping "terror of London" was identified by author Peter Haining as a nobleman, the Marquis of Waterford, who was notorious for playing nasty and vicious pranks on unsuspecting pedestrians. Waterford was suspected of involvement in the scare of 1837–38 in London, partly because of the rumour reported to the Lord Mayor that a group of aristocrats had taken a wager to appear in the disguise of "a ghost, a bear and a devil" to scare an unspecified number of females.

Haining, author of *The Legend and Bizarre Crimes of Spring-heeled Jack* (1977), blamed the fire-breathing bugbear for at least four deaths, including that of an old woman whose body was found beside a road in Middlesex in 1863 "with such fear written across her face that she could only have been frightened to death by a terrifying attacker". Mike Dash, in *Fortean Studies* 3, pp7–125, found no contemporary evidence for Haining's claims, but his research did locate one example where Jack was found guilty of scaring a young girl to death.

The death of seven-year-old Jane Halsall followed one of the frequent ghost scares that plagued Liverpool and other northern cities during the late 19th century (**FT238:42–46**). According to the *Liverpool Mercury* of 15 December 1887, Jane heard from playmates that Spring-heeled Jack was on his way to terrorise Southport. Despite reassurances from her parents, she became terrified and called out "The ghost is coming". She died six hours later and an inquest jury returned a verdict of "death through congestion of the brain consequent upon fright". Coroner Sam Brighouse told jurors he "had no power over the person representing this ghost even if they could find him", but added: "I can only say that whoever this person was, he was a mean, cowardly and despicable fellow [and] sooner or later would be caught [and] would be the recipient of such punishment as would be a warning to him and others who were inclined to indulge in such silly freaks."



FD 995705

CERTIFIED COPY of an ENTRY
Pursuant to the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953

Registration District Sheffield

1855. Death in the Sub-district of Sheffield Park in the County of York

Columns:-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
57	Twenty Sixth February 1855 Court 24 South Street	Hannah RALLISON	Female	48 years	Wife of Robert Rallison Labourer	Sudden death in a fit beleived to have been brought on by fright	Henry P Badger Deputy Coroner Rotherham	Twenty Seventh March 1855	Benjamin Skidmore Registrar

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody.

Deputy Superintendent Registrar

-5 JAN 2011 Date

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ABOVE: The death certificate of Hannah Rallison, recording the cause as: "Sudden death in a fit believed to have been brought on by fright".

its truth, and as solemnly believe that it is the work of a supernatural agency." [8] John Favell continued to believe a woman had been murdered in the house and would not be dissuaded by the fact that the property he had rented was built less than a decade earlier.

I have not been able to discover what happened to Harriet Ward. A scathing report published by the *Sheffield Independent* on 17 March appeared to point the finger of blame for Hannah Rallison's death at Ward's "hysterical hallucinations". But apart from being called as a witness at the inquest, Ward escaped any legal responsibility. However, one week after the inquest, she was excommunicated by a unanimous vote of the Mormon congregation, including John Favell. It was not clear if this was a direct result of Ward's communication with a spirit, but by that time some of those present at the séance had come to believe "the apparition to emanate from his Satanic majesty, and hint that wonderful things may be expected in these marvellous times". Others pointed to the time chosen by the spirit to communicate with Ward. According to one local tradition: "The Devil is always in our midst at twelve o'clock, the hour of midnight." [9]

There was one final bizarre twist. On 17 March, the *Sheffield Independent* reported that what it called "the Campo Lane delusion" was not entirely a product of the imagination after all. "We have been informed," it pronounced, "that some of the alleged appearances have resulted from the operations with a magic lantern by the occupiers of adjacent premises, who knew that Favell and his family were Mormonites, and determined to have a lark at their experience."

Ghost shows and Phantasmagoria were a familiar sight at fairs and theatres during the Victorian period (see **FT207:37**), and this was not the first time the optical effects they produced had been invoked to explain ghost scares. In 1804, a group of soldiers claimed they saw the ghost of a headless woman in St James's Park, London, and one was so terrified by the vision that he was hospitalised. *The Times* later explained the "ghost" as "an application of the Phantasmagoria" [10] by two scholars from Westminster School who had set up their equipment in an empty house nearby.

As the spring of 1855 arrived, the crowds that had gathered outside Campo Lane had slipped away and the property reopened as a sweet shop. Harriet Ward, John Favell and their friends disappeared back into obscurity. The row of Victorian tenements where Ward communicated with spirits and Rallison died from fright was destroyed by German bombs during the Sheffield blitz of December 1940. Today, the site is home to a delicatessen and trendy city living apartments.

Did Harriet Ward communicate with a "lying spirit" or the ghost of a murdered woman? Was she deluded, or simply a liar? Whether it was a ghost, a devil or a delusion, Hannah Rallison took fright and died as a result. FT

NOTES & REFERENCES

1 Joseph Woolhouse: *Sheffield 150 Years Ago* (pamphlet), Sheffield, 1832.

2 *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent, 10 Mar 1855.*

3 *Sheffield Times, 10 Mar 1855.*

4 *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent, 10 Mar 1855.*

5 *[ibid].*

6 *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent, 17 Mar 1855.*

7 Inquest reports, *Sheffield Times; Sheffield Free Press; Sheffield & Rotherham Independent, 3 Mar 1855.*

8 *Sheffield Free Press, 10 Mar 1855.*

9 Sidney Addy: *Household Tales and Other Traditional Remains*, London & Sheffield, 1895.

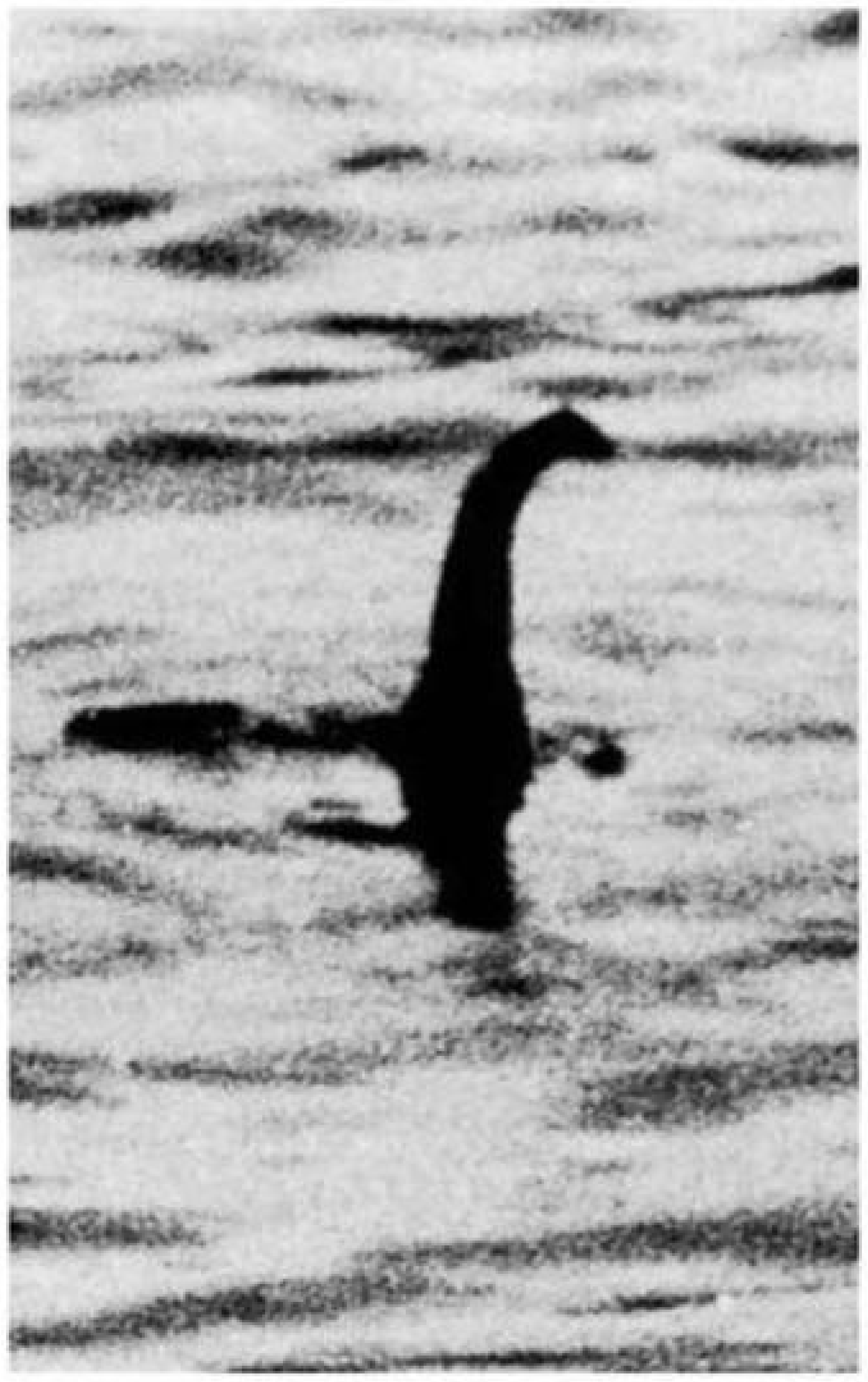
10 Owen Davies: *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts*, Palgrave, 2007, p201.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

DAVID CLARKE is head of the journalism department at Sheffield Hallam University. He is a frequent contributor and regular columnist for *Fortean Times*. He has a PhD in folklore and is consultant for the National Archives for the ongoing release of the MoD's UFO files.

THE SUBS OF LOCH NESS

JEFFREY VALLANCE stirs up the murky waters of Loch Ness as he dredges up the strange, submarine history of the lake's mechanical inhabitants.



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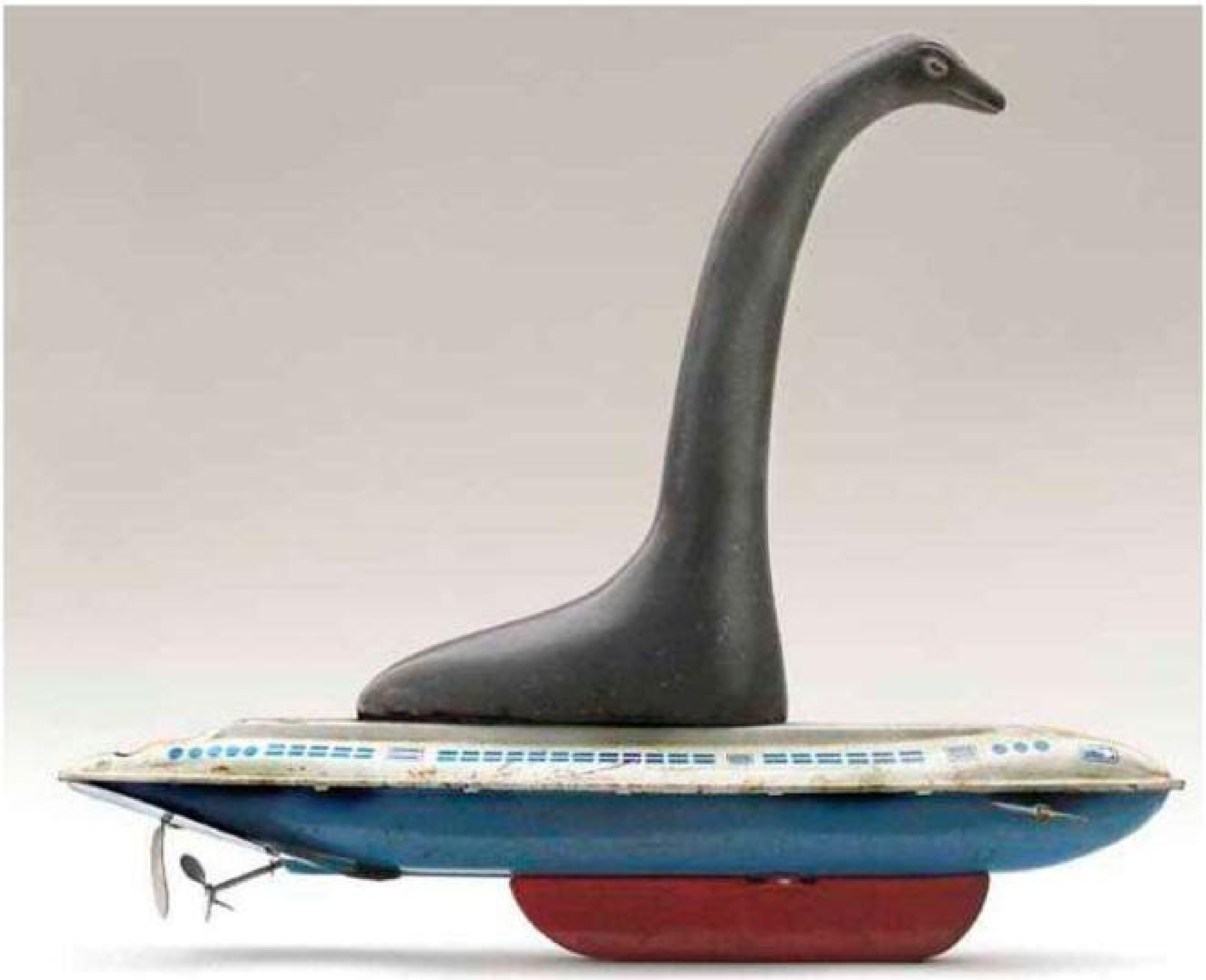


JEFFREY VALLANCE

ABOVE LEFT: The classic 'Surgeon's Photograph' of the Loch Ness Monster taken in 1934 and showing a model created by Christian Spurling.
ABOVE RIGHT: A 'Nessie Sub' recreating Spurling's hoax. It was made by the author using a vintage toy submarine and plastic wood.

In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea. — Isaiah 27:1

THE SAINT AND THE SERPENT

Along the banks of Loch Ness there once lived a people called the Picts (from the Latin *picti*), so named because they covered their bodies with strange tattooed symbols – like some rowdy guys I once met in a biker bar. These 'painted people' also carved similar pictographs on commemorative *stelæ* called Pictish stones. One such stone bears the image of a dragon-like *kelpie* (or water horse), complete with a beak and flippers. Some believe this may be the first picture of the Loch Ness Monster (*Nessiteras rhombopteryx*) or "Nessie".

This carved stone can be seen today at Urquhart Castle beside Loch Ness. In AD 565, Father Columba of Iona was on his way to convert Brude, King of the Picts. Standing on the shore of Urquhart Bay, Columba observed the terrifying monster's attack on a man swimming in the loch. The saint made the sign of the holy cross in the air, which drove the creature back into the murky depths of the loch – thus making Nessie harmless forevermore. Columba's monster seems akin to the biblical leviathan, the demonic sea monster mentioned six times in the Old Testament.

A PLESIOSAUR HEAD WAS ATTACHED TO A TOY SUBMARINE

Later honoured as patron saint of poets, St Columba founded two churches in nearby Inverness. His relics are preserved in Dunkeld, Scotland.

I will not conceal his parts, nor his power, nor his comely proportion. — Job 41:12

THE SURGEON'S PHOTOGRAPH AND THE TOY SUB

One thousand three hundred and sixty-nine years after St Columba encountered Nessie, what has become the most famous photograph of the monster was taken. This photo is now called the "Surgeon's Photograph".

Beginning in the 1930s, various types of submarine have been launched on Loch Ness to perpetuate hoax sightings of the Loch Ness Monster. The Surgeon's Photograph was part of one such hoax, concocted by big-game hunter Marmaduke Wetherell, who employed his son Ian as the photographer. On 19 April 1934, Ian took a photo of a plastic plesiosaur head attached to the top of a toy submarine – a tin windup toy purchased from a Woolworth's department store in Richmond, Surrey. Wetherell also enlisted his stepson, artist and model-maker Christian Spurling, to create the monster's head. Spurling spent eight days making the 12in (30cm)-high head and neck out of plastic wood, which he painted grey and attached to the conning tower of the submarine. The sub was then launched on one of the loch's many inlets, with the monster's head and neck staying above the surface. The Surgeon's Photograph was purposely taken from an angle that revealed familiar Loch Ness landmarks in the background; the small ripples on the calm bay made the plastic monster appear much larger than it was.

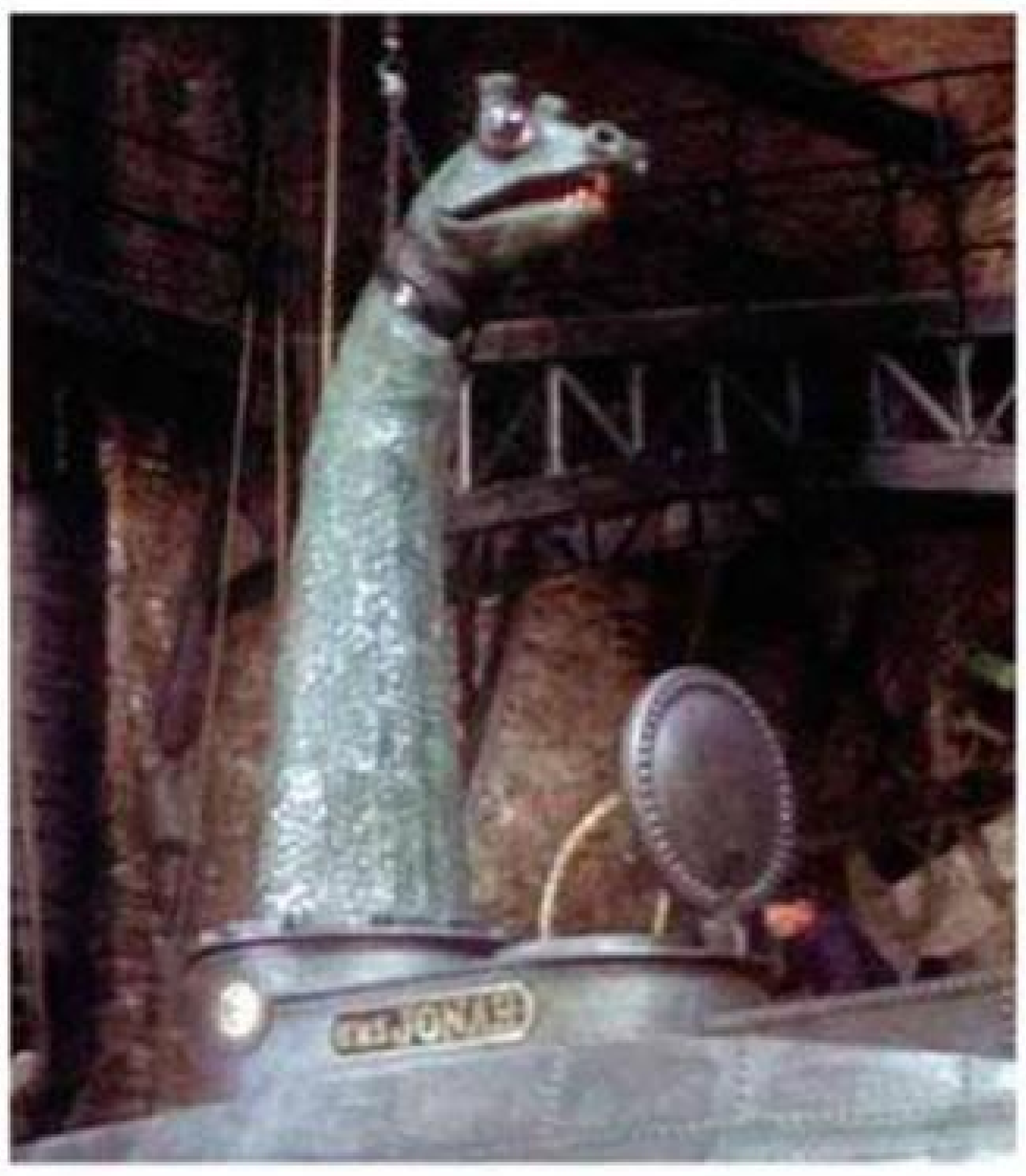
The father-and-son team was almost caught mid-hoax, but when they saw the water bailiff approaching, they quickly sank the toy sub.

Before undertaking the hoax, Wetherell had persuaded London gynæcologist and noted prankster Dr Robert Kenneth Wilson to take credit for the photo – a surgeon, Wetherell reasoned, would be a more credible witness. When the photo was published, Dr Wilson was brought before the British Medical Association's board of surgeons and was reprimanded, narrowly avoiding the loss of his medical license. After that, Wilson remained silent on the subject of the photo.

Christian Spurling confessed to his part in the hoax 60 years later, , saying: "The whole thing was a load of codswallop." [see **FT76:15]** (Incidentally, the term *codswallop* is derived from the root *cod*, a little-used slang word, meaning "to hoax".) [1] But some diehard Nessie researchers claimed that the original toy-submarine story is the *real* hoax. One of these researchers, Henry H Bauer, author of *Enigma of Loch Ness: The Making of a Mystery*, found it implausible that the hoax would endure for 60 years prior to its debunkery. Bauer also claimed that the plastic wood used to make the monster head did not exist in 1934.

I see Spurling's Nessie hoax as early performance art and Spurling himself as a pioneering conceptual artist. Spurling's project was the first of many performance art-like pieces executed at the Loch. In 1977, self-styled wizard and professional artist Anthony "Doc" Shiels, with the aid of a worldwide group of witches, including his daughters, claimed to have invoked Nessie by the use of ancient magic and psychic powers. At Urquhart Castle, Shiels said he snapped a photograph of the monster showing its head and neck (**FT22:23–26**; **29:26–31**); later, when the image was analysed by a computer, it was revealed to be a double exposure of one of his own paintings over a photo of ripples on the surface of water. In 1994, French performance artist Don Jean Haberey, whose stage name is Hors Humain (beyond human), set sail upon the waters of Loch Ness in a strange vessel draped in black plastic. He chanted and beat a large kettledrum mounted on the foredeck of the craft in hopes of rousing the legendary cryptid. Some Nessie researchers lament that Loch Ness attracts weird and bizarre characters, making serious scientific research difficult. In terms of art, since 1917, when Marcel Duchamp called a urinal a 'readymade' work of art, it has become increasingly hard for the general public to tell the difference between a prank and conceptual art. Over the years, there have been many hoaxed sightings of Nessie and some of these, in retrospect, appear now more like performance-art pieces.

This whole plesiosaur-head-hoax business reminds me of something I did as a child: attaching putty to the bottom of a plastic brontosaurus, weighing it down so it seemed to be swimming in the small pond in our backyard.



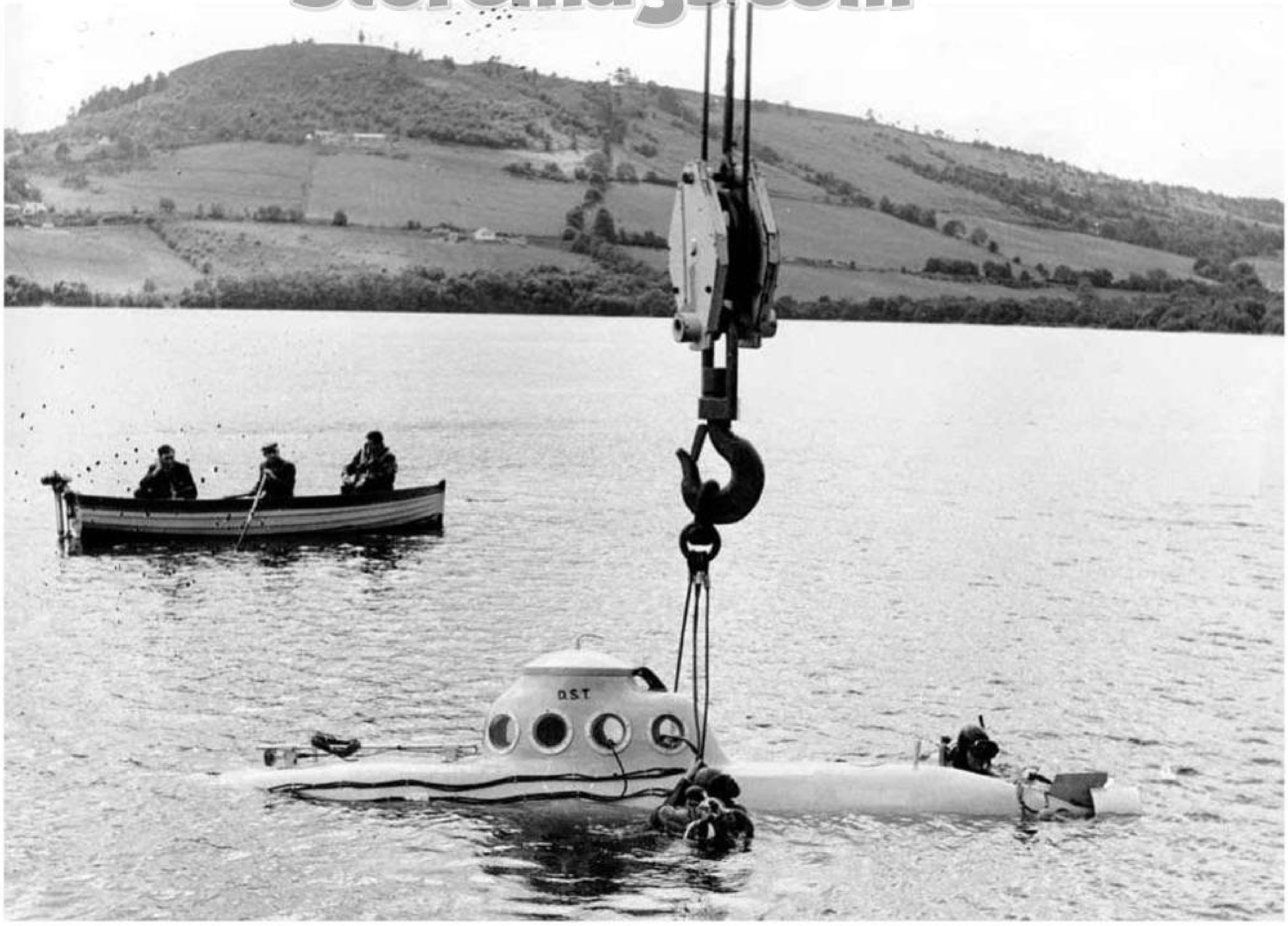
Thou breakest the heads of leviathan. — Psalms 74:14

HOAXES, REPLICAS AND PROPS

Over the years, a number of other submarines, some with fake plesiosaur heads, others exact replicas of Spurling's toy sub, have been launched:

- In 1969, while shooting the film *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, starring Christopher Lee, the submarine *Pisces* was used to tow a dummy monster around the lake. Unfortunately, the dummy broke free and sank to the bottom. In the movie, which came out the following year, a crew consisting of midgets piloted a small sub disguised as the Loch Ness Monster – which looked like a huge version of Spurling's sub, including a detachable plesiosaur head. But they could not possibly have known of Spurling's hoax, as it would not be revealed until the late 1990s. Had the filmmakers inadvertently predicted the revelation of the Spurling hoax by nearly 30 years?
- In 1979, shooting began on a Japanese film, co-produced by Toho Company Ltd and Hammer Film Productions, in which special-effects master Teruyoshi Nakano created a submersible prop of Nessie. The film was never released, but Nakano resurrected the Nessie prop in his 1987 film *Taketori Monogatari* ("Princess from the Moon").
- In 1995, Independent Television News (ITN) and A&E Channel released the documentary *Ancient Mysteries: The Loch Ness Monster*, in which the filmmakers experimented with a replica of Spurling's submarine.
- In 1997, authors David Martin and Alastair Boyd used a Spurling sub replica as part of the research for their book *Nessie: The Surgeon's Photograph Exposed*.
- In 2004, the mockumentary film *Incident at Loch Ness*, starring Werner Herzog, featured a subaquatic Nessie prop created by the

TOP AND ABOVE: The *HMS Jonah*, featured Billy Wilder's 1970 film *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, resembled a giant version of Spurling's 1934 creation.



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DICK RAYNOR

DICK RAYNOR

ABOVE: Dan Taylor's *Viperfish* is launched on Loch Ness in 1969. **CENTRE:** A *Pisces* PC8-class sub used in 1973. **BOTTOM:** The *Loch Ness Submarine* in the 1990s.

special-effects company KNB EFX Group, Inc. That same year, an animatronic model of a plesiosaur was created as part of a documentary for UK television Channel Five. As a hoax, the model (dubbed "Lucy") was set loose, prompting hundreds of reported Nessie sightings before sinking to the bottom of the loch.
• In 2006, naturalist and head of the Loch Ness Project, Adrian Shine, launched a functioning reconstruction of Spurling's toy submarine.

There go the ships: There is that leviathan. — Psalms 104:26

RESEARCH VESSELS

Concurrent with these hoaxes, replicas and submersible animatronic props, legitimate submarine research vessels were probing the depths of the loch, all in search of the Loch Ness Monster:
• In 1969, Captain Dan Taylor's submersible *Viperfish* was equipped with biopsy darts intended to collect tissue samples. In addition, the *Pisces* picked up a large unknown moving object on sonar near the bottom of the loch, but as the sub approached, the object moved rapidly out of range and disappeared.
• In 1973, Vickers Oceanics tested a *Pisces* PC8-class submersible with a robotic manipulator arm, under the auspices of the Academy of Applied Science.
• In 1974, Adrian Shine built his own homemade bathysphere, the *Machan*, in his parents' backyard, using fibreglass and plate glass. (Adrian's submersible is now on display at the Loch Ness Centre in Drumnadrochit.)
• As part of the 1976 documentary *The Legend of Loch Ness*, the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau dropped a small submarine equipped with a sonar-triggered camera into the loch near Urquhart Castle.
• In 1981, the Thales *Seapup*, a remotely operated underwater vehicle (ROV), surveyed the wreck of a WWII Vickers Wellington bomber that had been ditched in the loch in 1940. In 1985, the bomber was recovered and is now on display at the Brooklands Museum in Weybridge, Surrey.
• In 1991, the *Sea Owl 500*, a tethered ROV built by Scandinavian Underwater Technology (SUTEC), scanned the lake bottom with a video camera. The footage was included in the 1993 Discovery Channel documentary *Loch Ness Discovered*.
• Between 1994 and 1995, a former Royal Naval vessel, the *Loch Ness Submarine* (or *Swatch Submarine*), was piloted by Captain Allan Whitfield. Based at Clansman Harbour, the sub was chartered for commercial dives, carrying up to five passengers at a time to the middle of the loch.

- In 1998, Captain Dan Taylor began construction on his new submarine *Nessa*, named for the Gaelic goddess of water. Sadly, Taylor died in 2005 before *Nessa* reached Loch Ness.
- In 2002, the American Academy of Applied Science used a Cabaco *SeaRover* ROV to find the remains of John Cobb's jet-powered boat *Crusader*, which sank in 1952. Cobb was killed when the *Crusader*, travelling at over 200mph (320km/h), hit a wake and instantly disintegrated.
- In 2008, as part of the History Channel documentary *MonsterQuest: Death of Loch Ness*, Nessie researcher Robert Rines launched two ROVs equipped with grabber arms to comb the loch bed for the bones and carcass of what he believed was the dead Loch Ness Monster.
- Two other submarines, the *Star III*, built by General Dynamics, and *Deep Star 4000*, designed by Jacques Cousteau and built by Westinghouse, were scheduled for launch on the loch, but, for various technical reasons, never made it into the water.

It is sometimes tricky to sort out all the subs, as some have had a variety of incarnations and were repainted with different sponsors' logos.

Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook? — Job 41:1–34

SUNKEN SUBMARINE RETRIEVAL

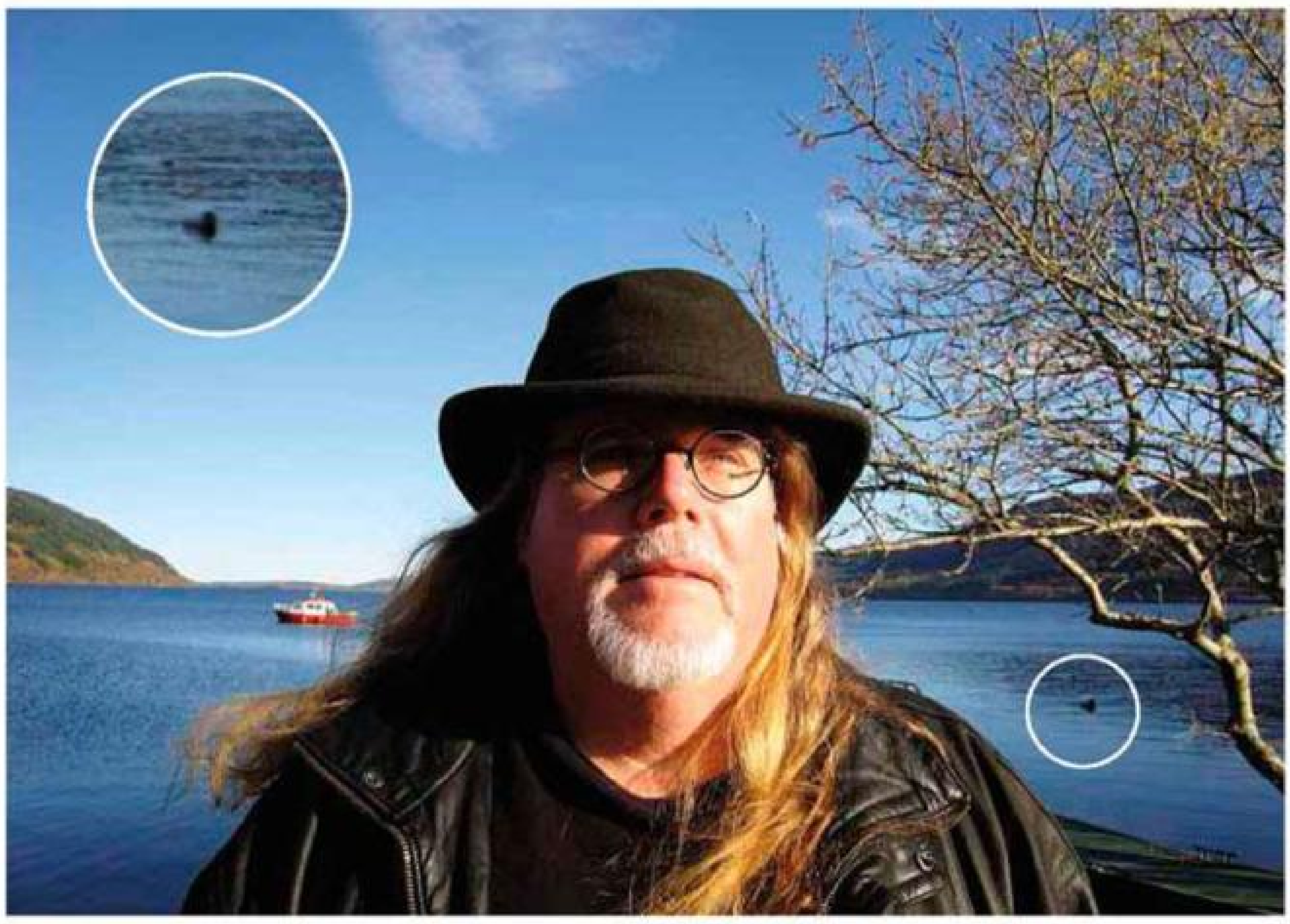
Many of the submersibles have met the same fate – they now lie on the loch's silty floor. So I propose a new branch of Loch Ness research: retrieving the hoax submarines and Nessie dummies that have sunk to the bottom. Christian Spurling's tin submarine should be easy to find, as it sank in the shallow waters of an inlet. The background scenery in the photo should provide clues as to its precise location, and the peat sediment on the bottom of the loch has no doubt helped to preserve it. The two sunken film props of Nessie could be located by sonar, and then an ROV with a robotic arm could be sent down to retrieve them. Imagine what fascinating relics these would be in a Loch Ness exhibition.

Ready to rouse leviathan. — Job 3:8

LOCH NESS MINI-SUB EXPEDITION

In the study of Nessie, it seems like anyone who is anybody has launched a submarine on the loch. So on my research expedition to Loch Ness, in 2009, I launched a remote-control mini-sub (model RC-49 submersible) nicknamed "Orm", the Norse word for sea serpent. My submarine was not used as a hoax or a replica model of Spurling's toy sub, but as an art piece. My project was to research the V-shaped ripples produced by the mini-sub on the surface of Urquhart Bay. I photographed the RC-49 from a perspective similar to that of the Surgeon's Photograph, to see if comparable results could be produced. My submarine did not have a plesiosaur head attached, but the periscope served the same purpose – creating V-shaped ripples as the vessel rose to the surface of the loch.

I set up my field headquarters at the picturesque mediæval Urquhart Castle, near the village of Drumnadrochit. For one hour, my RC-49 submerged and resurfaced, perhaps a dozen times. At one point, a flock of ducks appeared nearby, to be startled by the mini-sub's periscope as it broke the surface of the water. I was fortunate that my sub did not share the fate of so many others, as the RC-49 is particularly vulnerable to losing its radio signal on reaching a certain depth, at which point it would have been lost to the bottom of the loch.



VALLERIE McCOY

VALLERIE McCOY

JEFFREY VALLANCE

ABOVE AND LEFT: The author mounted his own project in 2009 using a radio-controlled mini-sub. **INSET:** "Something unidentifiable rising out of the water" seen in the background.

As a reference manual, I brought along a book by one of my colleagues, cryptozoologist Loren Coleman's *Field Guide to Lake Monsters, Sea Serpents, and Other Mystery Denizens of the Deep*. During my research at Loch Ness, I saw the same phenomena that have been interpreted over the years as monster sightings. I saw a small boat leaving serpentine waves in its wake. I encountered peculiar branches, roots and other floating material that took on eerie, creature-like appearances. And I watched waterfowl dive into the loch and bob on the surface, showing their arched, plesiosaur-esque necks. At one time or another, all these sorts of occurrences have been mistakenly attributed to the monster. The odd thing is that on almost any other lake in the world, these aquatic phenomena would be commonplace and barely noticed; but on Loch Ness, even the smallest disturbance on the water's surface takes on an almost magical quality.

After I had concluded my project with the mini-sub, my research assistant, Vallerie McCoy, took the obligatory picture of me standing on the shore of the loch, at the site where I launched my sub. It was not until later, when we looked closely at the photograph, that we saw something unidentifiable rising out of the water… FT

NOTE

1 Editor's note: Codswallop is usually said to derive from a Victorian businessman, Hiram C Codd, and 'wallop', a 19th-century slang term for beer. In 1872, Mr Codd began selling lemonade in green glass bottles with marble stoppers. The brew was humorously referred to as 'Codd's wallop'. Just how good it was can be guessed from the derisory tone of the term.

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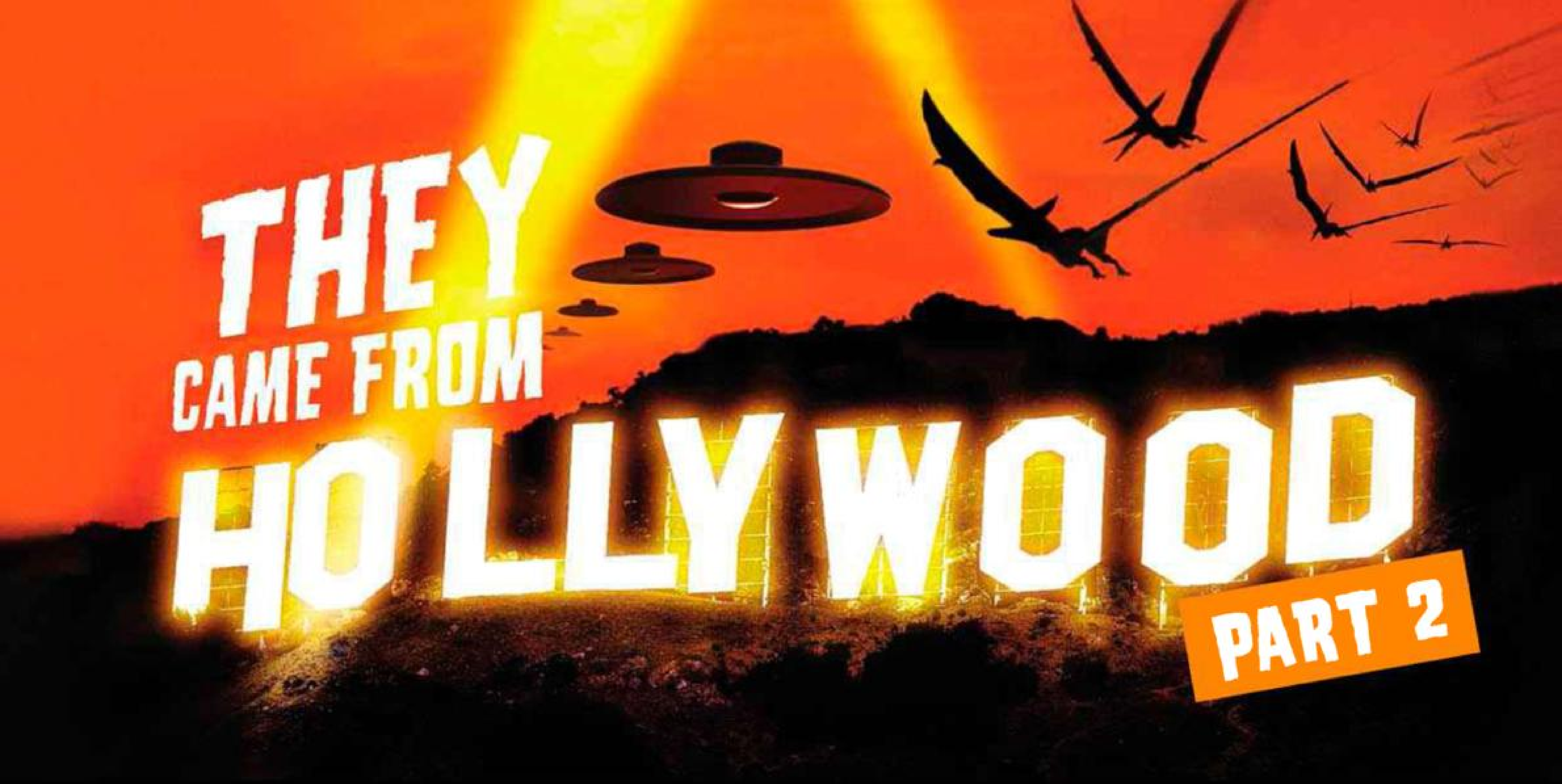
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

JEFFREY VALLANCE is an artist, writer, curator, explorer, Visiting Assistant Professor in new genres at UCLA and simulacrum hunter, and has been contributing regularly to *Fortean Times* since 1989.



THEY CAME FROM HOLLYWOOD

PART 2

PETER HASSALL concludes his trip through the weirdest byways of cinema history, looking for feature films in which genuinely anomalous phenomena such as UFOS, ghosts or monsters have allegedly been caught by accident on film.

MAIN ILLO: ALEX TOMLINSON/ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Hundreds of millions of feet of film have been shot, on location and in the studio, to bring to life cinematic worlds – from horror and sci-fi to comedy and drama. Is it possible that on a few occasions something truly anomalous in the background was caught on camera? Here I continue to examine claims of allegedly *real* UFOs, ghosts, and cryptids glimpsed in feature films.

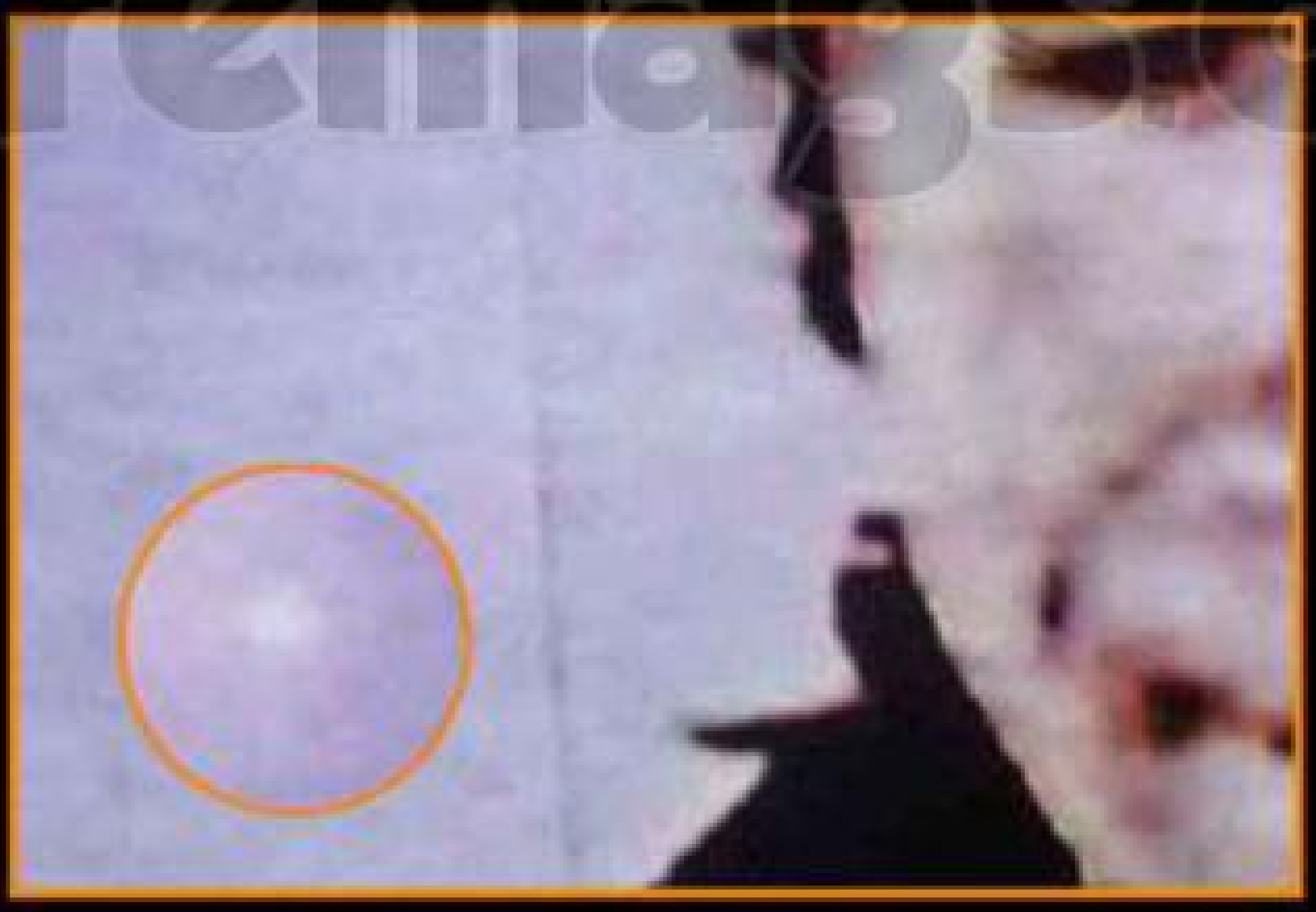
TITLE: A MAN CALLED GANNON

YEAR: 1968
LENGTH: 101M
DIRECTOR: JAMES GOLDSTONE
SCREENPLAY: GENE KEARNEY, BORDON CHASE AND DD BEAUCHAMP (BASED ON THE NOVEL *MAN WITHOUT A STAR* BY DEE LINFORD)
STARRING: ANTONY FRANCIOSA, MICHAEL SARRAZIN, SUSAN OLIVER, JUDY WEST

STORY: Gannon is a cowboy drifter who helps out a young hot-headed greenhorn called Jess and teaches him the ropes but they end up on opposite sides in a conflict.

THE CLAIM: "During filming, the cameras recorded two unidentified flying objects: one at Sonora, CA on [1 Nov 1967]; another at Broom Ranch near Camarillo, CA on [27 Dec 1967]." (IMDB site)

WHEN TO LOOK: 1:36:09 – 1:36:13 (four seconds duration).



WHERE TO LOOK: Moving from right to left on the screen about one third of the way up the frame. Franciosa's head is in the middle of the frame and the first flash of light is just above his horse's ear on the lower right of the frame. The flashes of reflected sunlight are brief and maddeningly difficult to see.

INVESTIGATION: Only one of the two apparent UFOs can be seen in the finished

TONY FRANCIOSA · MICHAEL SARRAZIN
"A MAN CALLED GANNON"
A UNIVERSAL PICTURE in TECHNICOLOR®
JUDI WEST · SUSAN OLIVER · JOHN ANDERSON

film as the other appeared behind the clapper board – used to synchronise sound with the picture at the start of each shot – this footage is obviously never used in the finished film.

According to the director James Goldstone, the object was not dirt on the film, not a laboratory marking and not lens flare. None of the cast or crew saw or heard any planes during the filming of the scene near Camarillo, California, and "the sky was unusually clear… absolutely cloudless, visibility was unlimited and nothing was in sight in the sky… yet the camera saw something which we were unable to see with our naked eyes."[1]

PROTECTING THE EARTH FROM THE SCUM OF THE UNIVERSE
MR. JONES
MR. SMITH
MEN IN BLACK

Tracking down a copy of this film proved almost as difficult as finding a print of *London After Midnight*. It had not been released on DVD and I spent two years trying to obtain an ex-rental videotape or even a copy taped off TV. The closest I got was finding some low-quality photo blow-ups from a video on a page at Allan Pachecopo's Santa Fe Ghosts and Mystery Tours site. Pachecopo told me they were taken from a copy-of-a-copy-of-a-copy VHS tape that had broken long ago.[2]

Then a Spanish edition DVD finally turned up for sale on eBay. At last, I could see the footage for myself and could compare it to the description. It was very difficult finding the four-second scene, and the brief flashes of light reflecting off something as it passes from right to left and behind Franciosa's head are very hard to see.

The infamous 1966–1968 Condon Committee (formerly called the University of Colorado UFO Project) had investigated the film (Case 58).

The clapperboard footage was shot on 1 November 1967 at Sonora, California, approximately 150 miles [240km] east of San Francisco. The Condon Committee report states it showed "a small bright source drifting slowly toward the top of the screen at the very beginning of a sequence while the camera slate is still being shown. The slate is removed and the scene shows only deep blue sky and the drifting object, which leaves the upper margin near the left corner after roughly ten seconds, before any subsequent action starts. The object is below or near the resolution of the film and resembles a wide-angle shot of the Moon, except that the camera was stationary and the object is drifting."[3]

Regarding the Camarillo footage, the Condon Report says: "During a dialogue sequence, the camera was focused on the head and shoulders of an actor [Anthony Franciosa] who was astride a horse. The horizon is out of the picture. At this time a pale, circular extended object, which appears to be an out-of-focus image of a point source or a small bright source, drifts across the screen from the right edge to the left edge in roughly 15 sec… The object definitely appears to pass behind the actor as it is not visible against several dark portions of his clothing… The shooting of this scene will not be cut from the final motion picture."[4]

The object reflecting light is only visible for four seconds, not 15, in the released film so the shot must have been shortened to reduce the obviousness of what was going on in the background.

The Condon Committee concluded that "[R]eal objects were photographed in both cases… the information content of the films is so low that the cases are of little value… In addition, it strains credulity to argue that a single film crew would unknowingly and accidentally photograph rare, extraordinary objects on two occasions occurring 56 days and approximately 275 mi. [440km] apart. Alternatively, it is easy to argue that both objects may have been some sort of wind-blown debris, either natural, such as a bit of milkweed-type plant debris, or artificial, such as a bit of white tissue. A two-inch [5cm] diameter white object at about 50ft [15m] would be consistent with the observations. The camera crew, checking for aircraft, would not have seen anything."[5]

That last statement is not necessarily true. I am sure the crew of *The Lord Of the Rings* film trilogy were on the lookout for any modern anachronisms in the backgrounds of shots – yet sunlight reflected off a car windscreen and the cloud of dust from it driving on a dirt road appeared in the background of one scene.[6]

There are small airports near both Sonora and Camarillo, but the movements of whatever is reflecting the light do not appear to be consistent with a light aircraft.

CONCLUSION: Uncertain. The Condon Committee could actually be right for once. Possibly the mystery objects were just small pieces of material. But perhaps they were larger metallic objects further in the distance reflecting sunlight.

ALSO LOOK OUT FOR: Sarrazin's face as he stops just short of a cow pat while finishing a slide across the ground.

TRIVIA: The film nicely captures the modernisation of the American Wild West including the introduction of the telegraph, barbed wire and indoor flush toilets.

TITLE: MEN IN BLACK

YEAR: 1997
LENGTH: 94M
DIRECTOR: BARRY SONNENFELD
SCREENPLAY: ED SOLOMON (BASED ON THE COMIC BY LOWELL CUNNINGHAM)
STARRING: WILL SMITH, TOMMY LEE JONES, RIP TORN

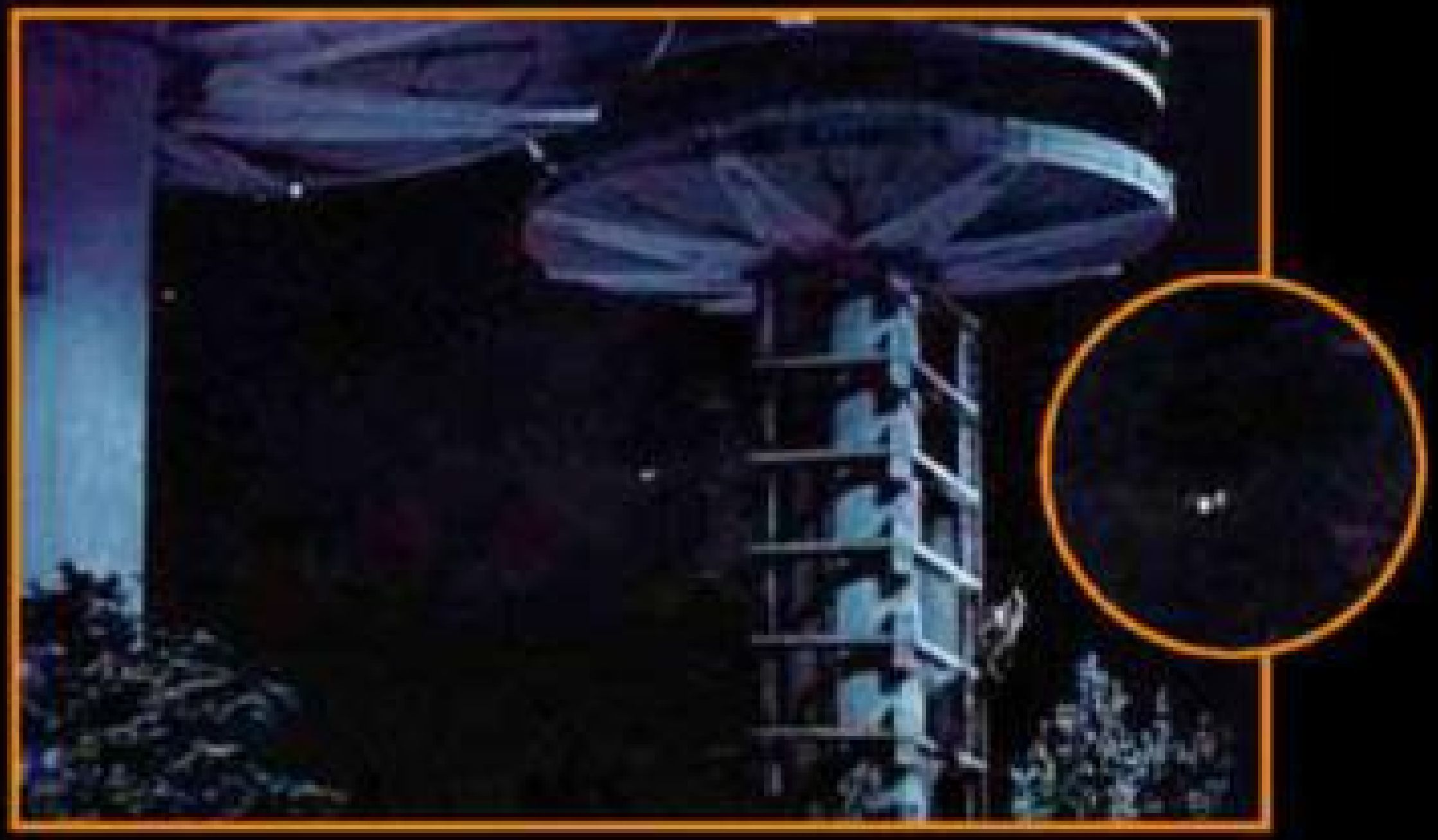
STORY: The infamous MIBs of UFOlore are actually the heroes in this film as they deal with – literally – illegal aliens.

THE CLAIM: "There is a strange white dot that slowly moves across the sky. This occurs during the seen [*sic*] where the bug takes the doctor from the morgue to the space ship that is disguised as a water tower. This happens before the bug climbs the ladder to the ship." [Kirk Stauss, quoted in the Hierophant column in ***FT126:61***]

WHEN TO LOOK: 1:15:21 – 1:15:24 (three seconds duration).

WHERE TO LOOK: There are actually two groups of flashing lights, the first moving left to right across the screen about half way up the frame and the second moving right to left about one third of the way up the frame. They are both visible in the night sky between the two observation towers built for the 1964–1965 World's Fair.

INVESTIGATION: This was an easy one. The mysterious groups of lights are very obviously normal aircraft with anti-collision lighting. Jason Sferlazza (creator of the tentoftomorrow.com site) confirmed that the "LaGuardia Airport is only a mile or so from the Fairgrounds."[7]



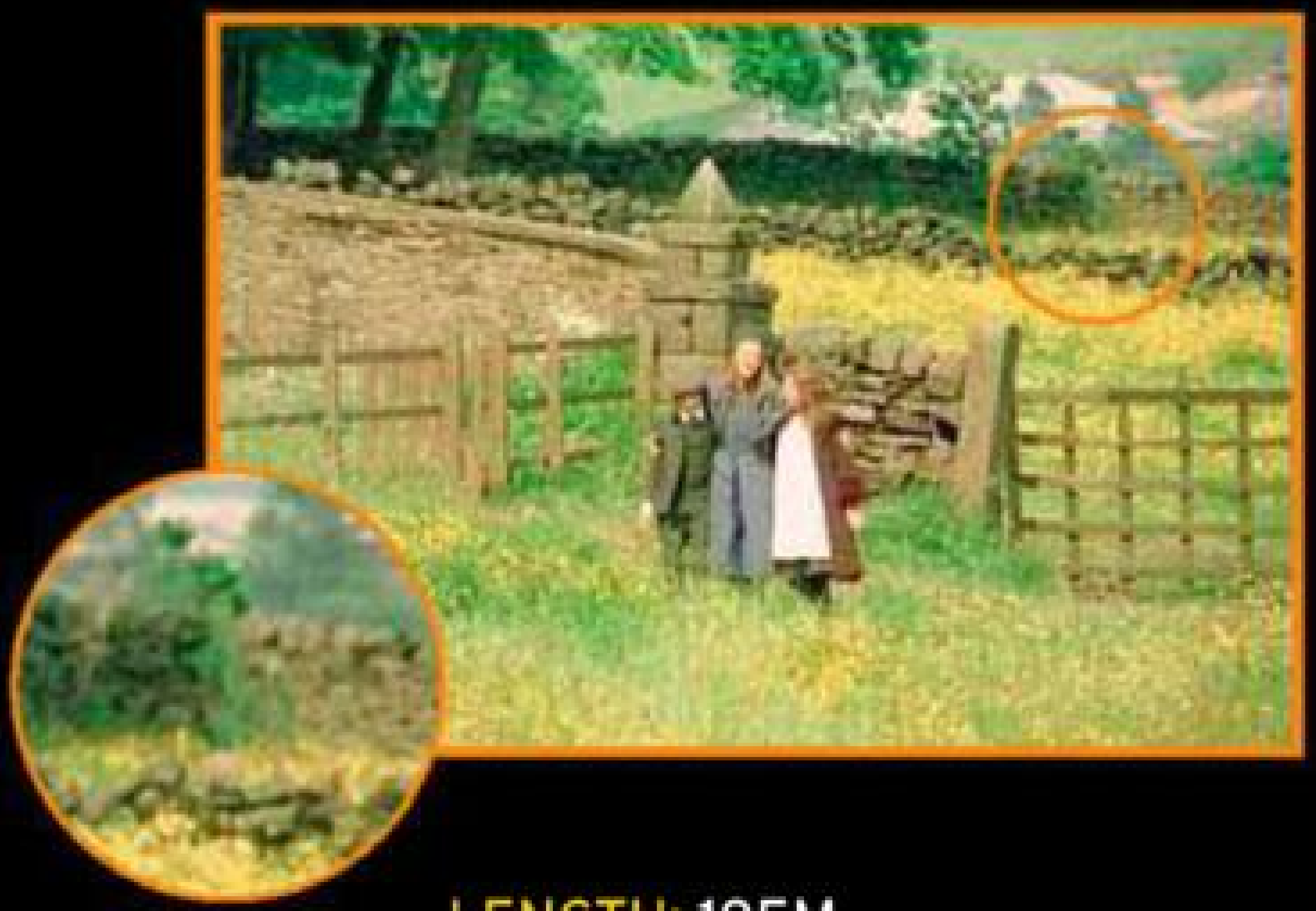
CONCLUSION: Memory can play tricks (also see *The Railway Children* entry following). Rather than a single strange light, what is on screen is very obviously two aircraft moving in opposite directions.

ALSO LOOK OUT FOR: Will Smith chasing down a very agile alien who can jump off a bridge onto the street below, back-flip off a wall and climb the sheer face of a building.

TRIVIA: Sales of the Ray-Ban RB 2030 Predator sunglasses worn by Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones tripled after the release of the movie.

TITLE: THE RAILWAY CHILDREN

YEAR: 1970



LENGTH: 105M
DIRECTOR: LIONEL JEFFRIES
SCREENPLAY: LIONEL JEFFRIES (BASED ON THE NOVEL BY E NESBIT)
STARRING: JENNY AGUTTER, SALLY THOMSETT

STORY: In 1905, three children move with their mother to rural Yorkshire, where they become fascinated by the railway and try to discover the reason for their father's disappearance.

THE CLAIM: "Something very large slithers over a wall in the background and falls to the ground. It looks like a 20ft [6m] amœba which has scaled the other side of the wall and slithered over." [letter from Roger Morgan, *FT154:55*]

WHEN TO LOOK: 1:42:33 – 1:42:35 (two seconds duration)

WHERE TO LOOK: The alleged "blob" is on the furthest back stone wall in the background, to the right of the three children. It can be seen as they walk towards the camera in a group, immediately after Jenny Agutter says "I think, just now, we're not wanted there – not for a few minutes anyway."

INVESTIGATION: Unfortunately, Mr Morgan's memory was not accurate. Instead of Jenny Agutter being menaced by a giant living blob, it is merely a leafy branch that breaks off a tree and falls in front of the distant wall.

CONCLUSION: As with the *Men In Black* claim about a real UFO, this was clearly a case of the memory of what was seen becoming distorted over time. The alleged size of the object had also grown greatly in memory.

ALSO LOOK OUT FOR: An angry maid delivering a very nasty real slap to the face of the youngest of the railway children.

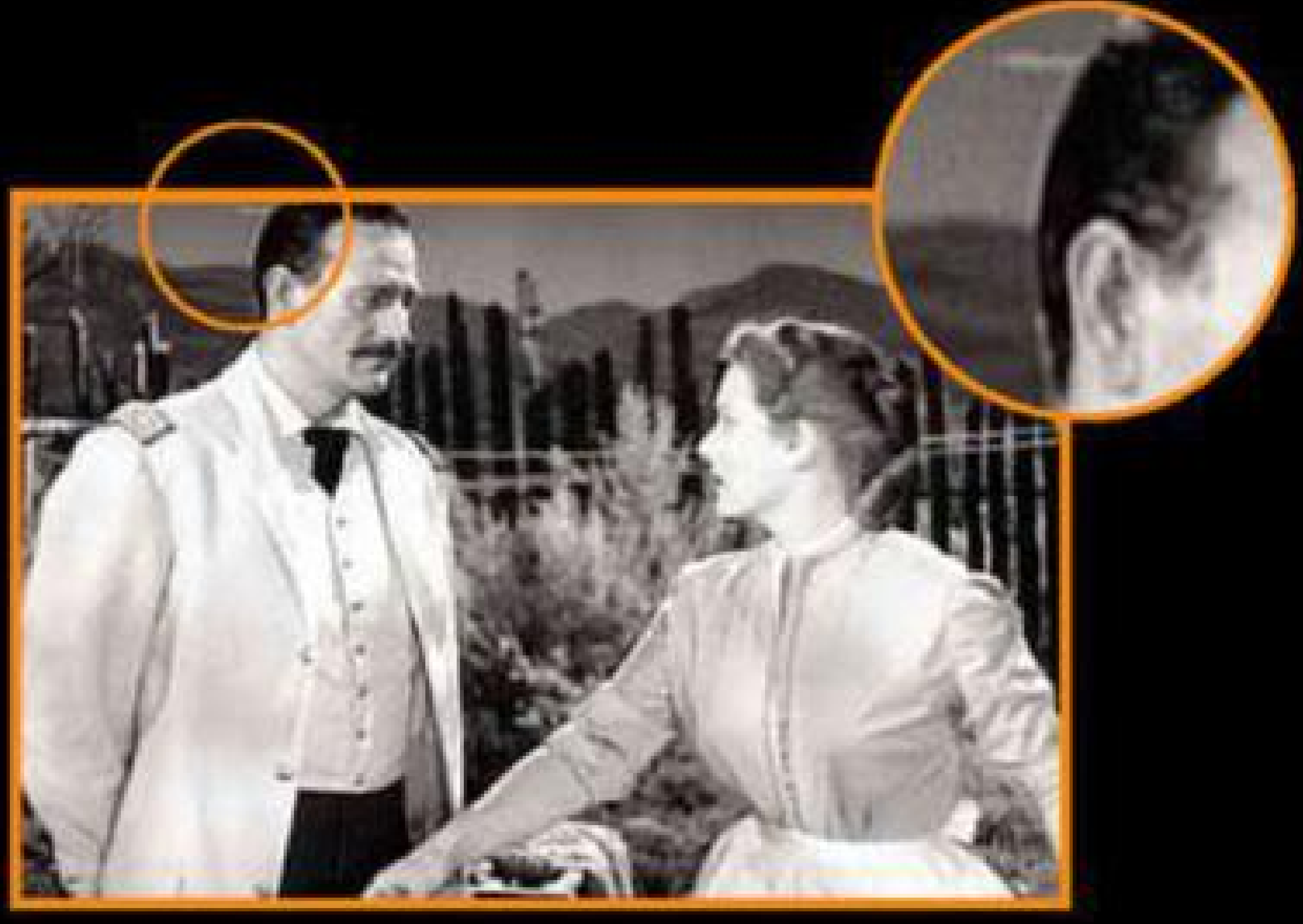
TRIVIA: Jenny Agutter grew up to play Jessica in *Logan's Run* and nurse Alex Price in *An American Werewolf In London* while Sally Thomsett grew up to play the dim-witted Jo in the classic British TV comedy *Man About the House*.

TITLE: RIO GRANDE

YEAR: 1950
LENGTH: 105M
DIRECTOR: JOHN FORD
STARRING: JOHN WAYNE, MAUREEN O'HARA
STORY: JAMES KEVIN MCGUINNESS (BASED ON A STORY BY JAMES WARNER BELLAH)
THE CLAIM: A UFO CAN BE SEEN HOVERING IN THE BACKGROUND BEHIND JOHN WAYNE IN A DIALOGUE SCENE WITH MAUREEN O'HARA.

STORY: At an army outpost, Trooper Kirby Yorke has to deal with hostile Apaches and a wife and son he hasn't seen in 15 years .

WHEN TO LOOK: 1:14:10 – 1:14:22 (12 seconds duration) and 1:14:26 – 1:14:28 (two seconds duration).



WHERE TO LOOK: From the start of O'Hara's saying "You do look very elegant, Kirby," a bright light appears in the background to the left of Wayne's head. It jumps around, then darts off to the right (and out of sight) behind his head. Four seconds later, it briefly reappears from the left side behind his head – this time higher up – and shoots to the left out of the top of the frame.

INVESTIGATION: Proponents of the idea that the curious light is a genuine UFO make a big deal out of the fact that *Rio Grande* was filmed entirely on location in Moab, Utah. As the light makes incredibly fast, erratic movements impossible for even a helicopter, it could not be a man-made aircraft of any type, they say.

An unusual counter-claim explains the light as the film's special effects masters Howard and Theodore Lydecker doing a test of a remote controlled model flying saucer to be used in *Flying Disc Man from Mars*. Allegedly, they were drunk at the time and the saucer crashed – never to be seen again.[8]

The Lydecker brothers were acclaimed model makers and used the then cutting-edge gravity-powered fly-by-wire techniques to guide model spaceships. Nobody then – or since – successfully flew a model that could perform intricate manœuvres as speedily as the light in the *Rio Grande* scene.

What also kills that idea is the fact that not every single scene was filmed on location. The interiors of tents and buildings were filmed in the studio. Also some close-up shots of the actors clearly had rear-screen projection backgrounds.

The UFO scene is certainly filmed in a soundstage. The background, including the mountains in the distance, is a painted backdrop. Thus, whatever the light is, it is

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certainly small. The backdrop must be fairly close to the actors – possibly as little as 5m (16ft) away.

Sometimes, there is just a bright white spot and at others there is apparently a dark area with a white spot on each side. It fluctuates in size and shape and is very unusual-looking.

My best guess would be that it is caused by a reflection from a studio light from the painted backdrop. Clark Boone has suggested the light source is reflecting from wires attached to a tent.[9]

CONCLUSION: Most probably a reflection of a studio light from the painted background, but there are still puzzling aspects.

ALSO LOOK OUT FOR: Daring "Roman racing" (standing astride the backs of two horses) by three of the young actors.

TRIVIA: A young stuntman and bit part player named Ben Johnson launched his acting career with this movie.

TITLE: THREE MEN AND A BABY

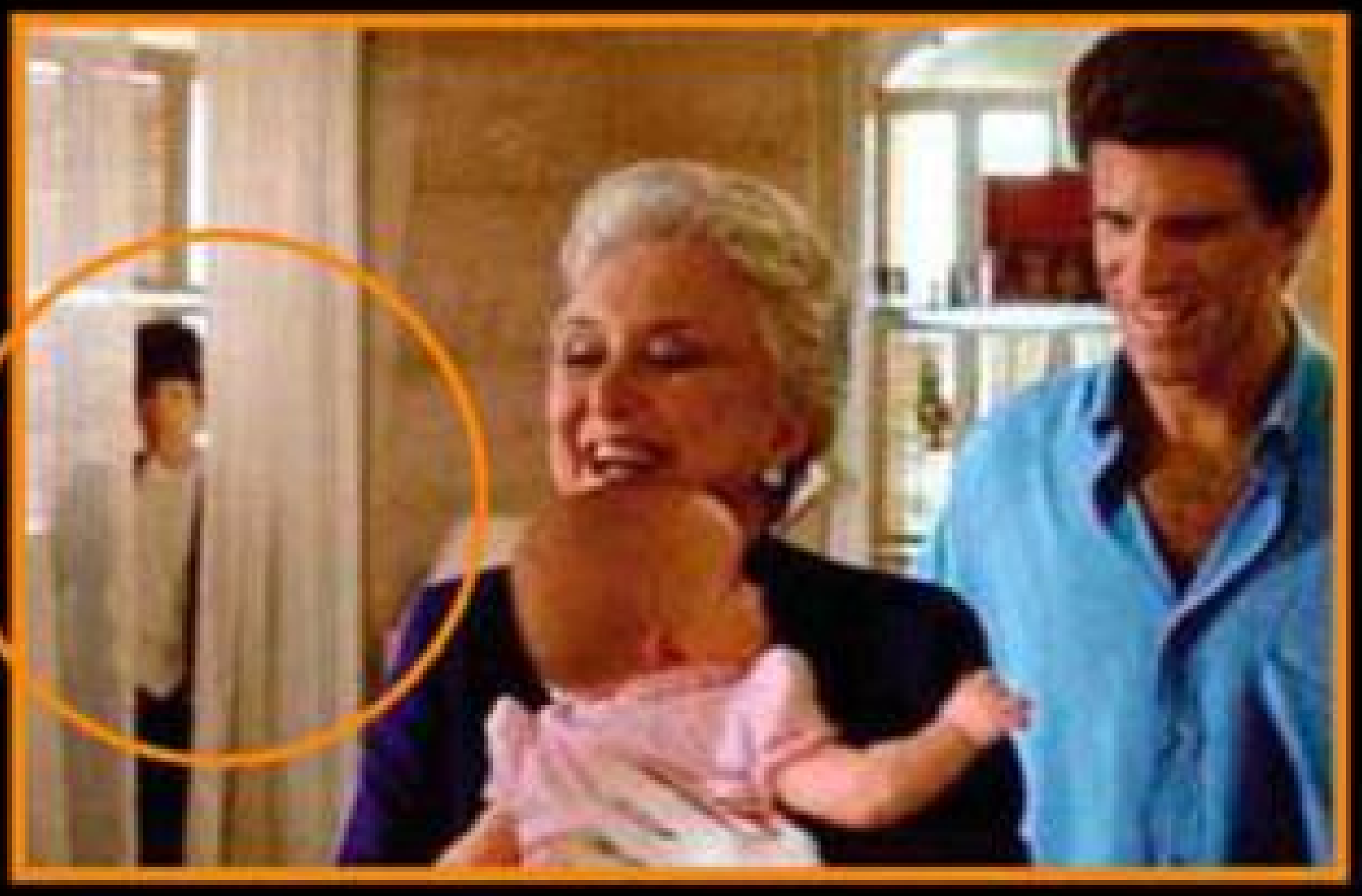
YEAR: 1987
LENGTH: 98M
DIRECTOR: LEONARD NIMOY
SCREENPLAY: JAMES ORR AND JIM CRUICKSHANK (BASED ON *TROIS HOMMES ET UN COUFFIN* BY COLINE SERVEAU)
STARRING: TOM SELLECK, STEVE GUTTENBERG, TED DANSON

STORY: Three bachelors sharing an apartment find themselves forced to take care of a baby left by one of the men's girlfriends.

THE CLAIM: The ghost of a dead boy is standing at a window in one scene. The Snopes urban legend site entry on this film describes various versions of the story.[10]

When to look: 0:59:17 – 0:59:21 (four seconds duration)

WHERE TO LOOK: Ted Danson is with Celeste Holm (playing the part of his character's mother) as she holds the baby. Immediately after Holm says the line "Look at the way she's looking at me", the camera pans to the left to follow them as they walk right to left past a window. In the window behind them is an odd, out-of-place figure.



INVESTIGATION: The Snopes site states that rather than the ghost of a dead boy who killed himself with a shotgun, the true explanation is that the figure is a cardboard standee of Ted Danson in a dinner jacket. They also say that the shotgun suicide part of the story is caused by an earlier shot when the standee can only be partially seen and the black part of one arm has the shape of a gun pointing downward.

I carefully examined the scene in question and can confirm this. From 0:58:48 – 0:58:49, the rifle or shotgun shape (barrel pointing down) can be seen momentarily as the camera passes the window when it pans from left to right to follow the actors walking to the baby. The apparent gun is actually the left arm of the standee and the face and torso of the standee are covered by a curtain, so cannot be clearly seen. As the camera is moving more quickly than it is later on, when it moves to follow the actors walking back, and the curtain is obscuring most of it, the standee is not obvious. Only the coincidental shape of the black clothed arm and the edges of the curtain making it look like a gun causes it to stand out at all.

What is puzzling is that in the continuation of the shot after the dialogue (there is no edit), when the camera moves back past the window, the ghostly figure/Ted Danson standee can be clearly seen as the curtain has mysteriously moved to the right uncovering the face and torso of the standee. It is not just a change of angle – previously the curtain was covering the face and torso of the standee.

The only conclusion is that somebody deliberately moved the curtain to the right in the slightly less than half a minute available when the camera is tightly focused on the actors while they talk before walking back past the window.

It would appear that somebody did this as a practical joke. They took a risk, but the director and crew would have been focused on the two actors and their dialogue and could have been oblivious to what was going on to the left and behind them.

The Ted Danson standee can be clearly seen later in the movie between 1:23:15 and 1:23:32, to the left of Ted Danson as he stands in front of a window.

There is also an unfounded claim on the Internet that the original film has been doctored or corrected to cover up the ghost and make it look like the standee. Some people claim to have seen the original run or video release of the film and that it was different.[11]

I also had a look at a couple of other claims – a ghostly hand near Ted Danson later in the scene and something spooky at the window in the scene when the three men sing to the baby to put her to sleep.[12]

I saw nothing. These claims are either jokes to get people to waste their time looking or some people have very active imaginations.

CONCLUSION: There is no doubt in my mind that the alleged ghost is a cardboard standee of Ted Danson. The only mystery is who moved the curtain to uncover it – and why. But believers will never be dissuaded.

ALSO LOOK OUT FOR: A Harlem Globetrotters pinball machine owned by the three bachelors.

TRIVIA: This was the first non-*Star Trek* movie that actor Leonard Nimoy (Mr Spock in the original *Star Trek* TV series) directed (previously he had directed *Star Trek III: The Search For Spock* and *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*).

AND FINALLY...

The next time you watch a movie, look past the actors and keep a close eye on what is going on in the background. Is that Bigfoot moving between the trees? The back of a monster just breaking the surface of the water? A ghost down the hallway? A UFO hovering in the clouds? You never know what 'reel' fortean treasures are waiting to be discovered. FT

NOTES

[1] Neville Drury: "Is Science Qualified?", *Australian UFO Reporter* (UFOIC-Sydney), No. 10, Dec 1969, p7.
[2] Pers. corr; http://bit.ly/uVh9ut (santafeghostandhistorytours.com).
[3] Dr Edward U Condon: *Scientific Study Of Unidentified Flying Objects*, Bantam, New York, 1969, p476.
[4] *Ibid*, pp476–477.
[5] *Ibid*, p 477.
[6] See http://bit.ly/rlkrTy (moviemistakes.com).
[7] Pers. corr.
[8] "UFOs in *Rio Grande*?", *Western Clippings* #64 (Mar/Apr 2005), available online at http://bit.ly/rztl75 (rense.com).
[9] Comment at http://bit.ly/rztl75 (rense.com).
[10] http://bit.ly/2jUHux (snopes.com).
[11] http://bit.ly/vm9DJM (eeggs.com).
[12] *Ibid*.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

PETER HASSALL is a stuntman and fight choreographer. He is interested in a range of forteana. When he has the time, he writes for FT, and has written about New Zealand UFOs in *The NZ Files* (1998).

The Fortean Times Random Dictionary of the Damned

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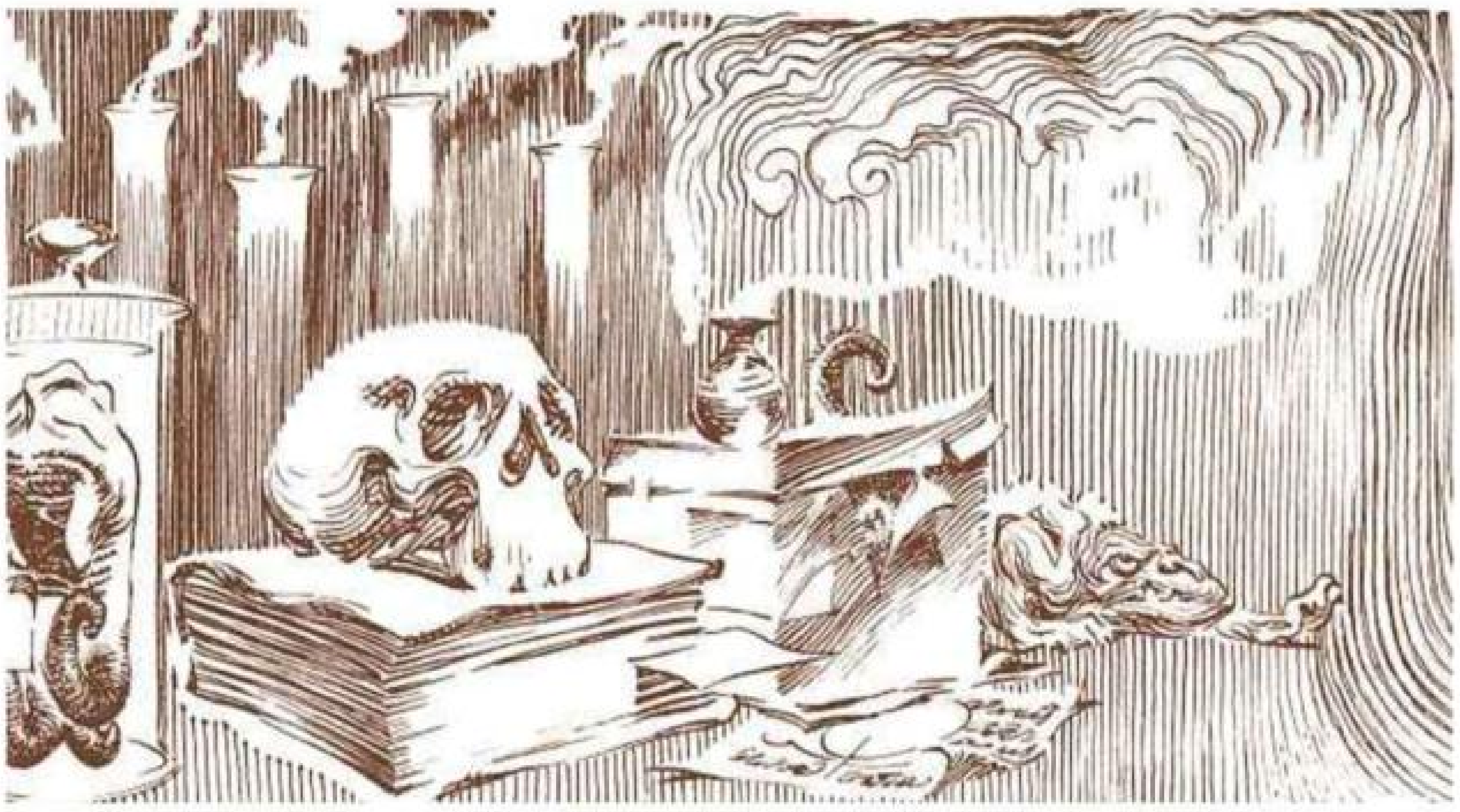


No 43: UFO CRASH RETRIEVALS PART ONE

Were one to believe everything one reads, one might conclude that the price of insurance premiums for drivers of flying saucers ought to be pretty steep. One current website lists 122 crashes of flying saucers on dates between 1864 and 2000. Another lists 272 such calamities, the first occuring as long ago as 10,000 BC, the latest also in 2000, with 24 cases left undated; the vast majority (224) have occurred since World War II, and most of those have been in the USA. Yet another site lists 51 crashes, dated between 1941 and 1997, in the former USSR and Soviet bloc countries alone.[1] One might also infer from these numbers that the designers and pilots of these rickety craft are curiously incompetent, somehow capable of travelling interstellar distances in presumed safety and yet strangely prone to having a prang while sculling around our planet. To be fair, since we have no idea how many alien craft there are in our skies, how many flights they make or how many hours or miles they're airborne, we can't say for certain that these reported crashes are *statistically* paradoxical.

But we can point out that among terrestrial airline flights there's one fatality per 12.5 billion miles (20bn km) flown, which is roughly equal to half a million circumnavigations of the Earth. It is also equivalent to 117 fatalities per billion airline journeys, or 30.8 fatalities per billion flying hours. As one source puts it, "Aviation accidents are extremely rare, with the probability of a passenger being killed on a single flight at approximately eight million-to-one. If a passenger boarded a flight at random, once a day, every day, it would statistically be over 21,000 years before he or she would be killed."[2] One would expect ETs, who are always alleged to be 'thousands or millions of years in advance' of us primitive Earthlings, to be doing better than we are. And if they are doing better, then it follows that there are countless millions of the little buggers skimming through our airpace every day. Somehow, this seems unlikely.

The simpler conclusion would be that accounts of crashed flying saucers are legends: which, to paraphrase the dictionary definition, are traditional stories popularly regarded as historical – that is, believed to be true – but unauthenticated or unverifiable: which is to say, their assertions lack solid evidence. Another definition[3] says legends are "highly ecotypified" – specifically located in place and time: as in Roswell 1947, Kecksburg 1965, Berwyn Mountain/Llandrillo 1974, Rendlesham Forest 1980, and so on. Yet another[4] says they are "simply the survival of rumour"; and we may recall that CG Jung described flying saucers as "visionary rumours". Before certain Serious Ufologists and their legions of acolytes march on Fortean Towers bearing pikes, halberds, hot tar, feathers, and a good strong rope, let us first point out that one of the remarkable features of crashed-saucer legendry is that, in several representative instances, we have been able to watch it being assembled before our eyes; and secondly, let us point out that those who by their first-hand testimony have helped in the construction are not necessarily – at least, not all – liars or calculating deceivers. But that doesn't mean that they, or those who assemble their accounts into books and documentaries, score high on any scale of historicity.

WHAT WE KNOW AND WHAT WE DON'T

In her 1995 book *UFO Retrievals: the recovery of alien spacecraft*, Jenny Randles remarks that the Roswell, Kecksburg, Berwyn Mountain, and Rendlesham Forest incidents "leave little alternative" than to conclude "there really was a crash and… that there was an attempted retrieval of whatever came down"; but sensibly adds that "that is not the same thing as stating that the objects which crashed were extraterrestrial spaceships." Randles approaches these and the other cases in her book in terms of 'evidence' – mainly eyewitness narratives, though by no means all are first-hand. What she doesn't analyse is the chronology of the emergence of this evidence, and the consequences thereof.

LEFT: Major Jesse Marcel poses with pieces of debris supposedly found 75 miles (120km) north-west of Roswell, NM, in June 1947.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

The Roswell Incident is a classic instance of this process, but it can be seen at work too in the granddad of crashed-saucer tales, Aztec, as well as in the Kecksburg, Berwyn Mountain, and Rendlesham Forest incidents.

The 'Roswell' story in its initial form is quite straightforward. On 14 June 1947, Mac Brazel found some curious "bright wreckage made up of rubber strips, tinfoil, a rather tough paper and sticks", some of which was held together with "tape with flowers printed upon it", on the isolated ranch on which he ran sheep. Some three weeks later, on 4 July, he gathered up most of this detritus. The following day, he visited Corona and heard tales of "flying disks" – Kenneth Arnold had had his seminal UFO sighting on 24 June, and the subject was still hot news – and wondered if 'his' wreckage was in some way connected. Two days later, he had to be in Roswell to sell wool, and took the opportunity to mention the debris to the local sheriff, who put him on to the Roswell Army Air Field. Intelligence officers Major Jesse Marcell and Captain Sheridan Cavitt drove out to the ranch and collected the material in Brazel's possession, plus more from the ground. The next day, 8 July, the *Roswell Daily Record* printed a front-page story announcing the Roswell AAF had "come into possession of a flying saucer". By the evening, Brig. Gen. Roger Ramey, commander of the Eighth Air Force at Fort Worth, Texas, was on the radio to explain that the wreckage had been identified as that of a weather balloon by Warrant Officer Irving Newton. Apart from the identification, in the 1990s, first by Karl T Pflock, then by the USAF, of the debris with that of an experimental, top-secret Mogul balloon train, that is the core of the Roswell Incident.

When Charles Berlitz and William Moore published *The Roswell Incident* in 1980, the story had expanded, and altered significantly. Brazel's discovery of 'his' wreckage was shifted to 3 July; the material was impervious to fire or sledgehammers, while the flowers on the tape had become alien pictograms or 'hieroglyphics'. The craft from which this material came had been struck by lightning, and (tracked by radar) eventually crashed on the Plains of St Augustin, some 120 miles (190km) further west. Before the military could locate what they thought was a crashed aeroplane, an archæological team came upon the downed saucer and corpses of 4ft (1.2m)-tall aliens. The military told the archæologists to say nothing, ushered them away, sealed the area, and gathered up every scrap of debris.

The next version of the story emerged in 1988, in the wake of the release of the (infamous, forged) MJ-12 papers. In this, the alien craft exploded on 2 July in mid-air, scattering wreckage on the Brazel ranch. On 7 July, a secret military retrieval operation began; aerial reconnaissance revealed four badly decomposed, diminutive alien corpses a couple of miles southeast of the debris field. There was 'alien writing' on the wreckage.

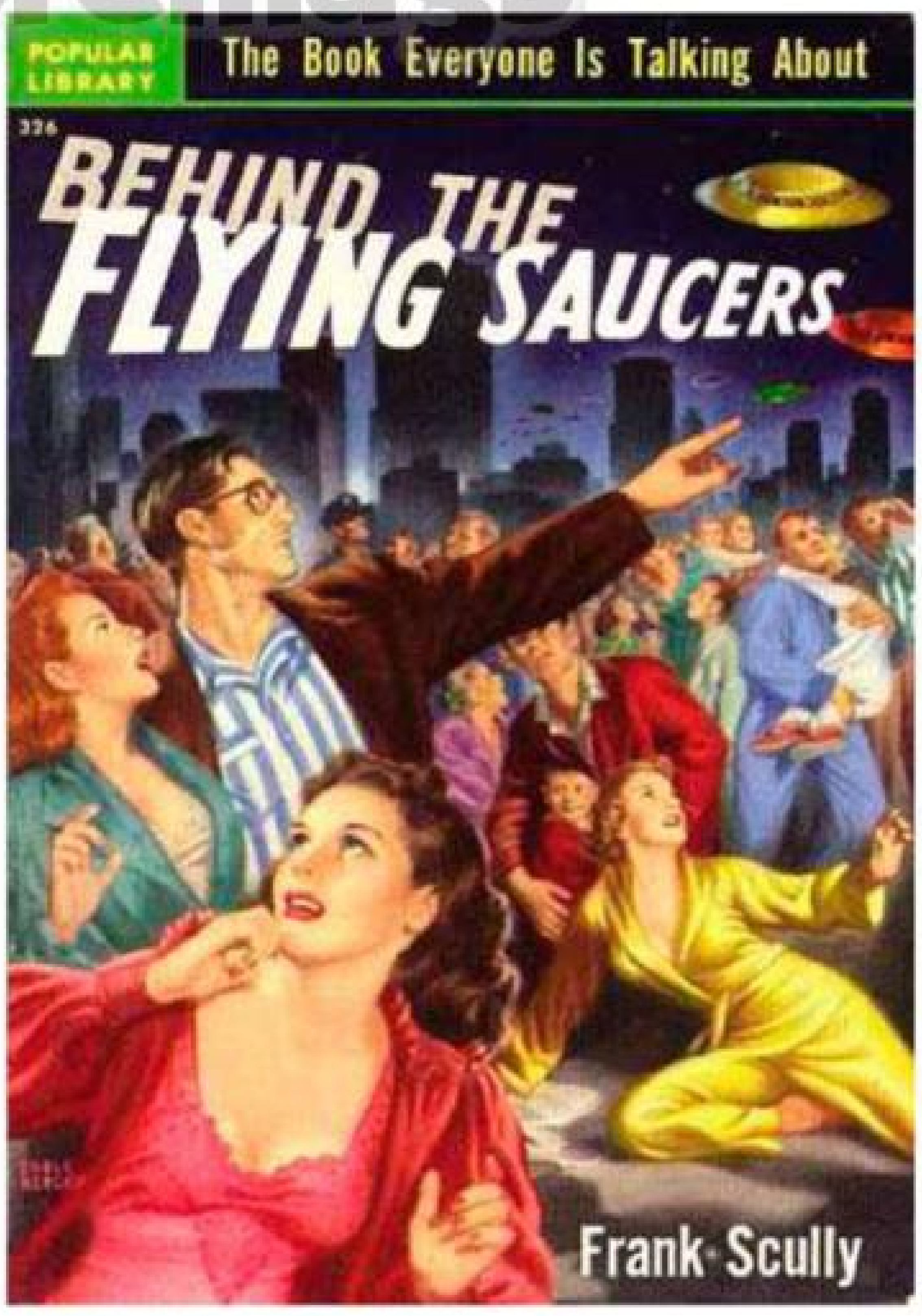
By the time Kevin Randle and Donald K Schmitt released *UFO Crash at Roswell* (1991), the MJ-12 papers had been thoroughly debunked. Nonetheless, some details from them crop up in their book. Once more, the date of the crash is given as 2 July – 18 days *after* Brazel found 'his' wreckage – but this time the craft left a 150ft (45m)-long gouge in the ground. There were inscrutable hieroglyphics on some of the debris, some of which was lighter but harder than any known terrestrial metal. Aerial reconnaissance revealed four badly decomposed, diminutive alien corpses a couple of miles southeast of the debris field. Archæologists reached the crash site and found the bodies before the military. Some wreckage and the bodies were sent to Roswell AAF, where at least one civilian witness saw them before being sent packing by military police. Brazel was given a cover story to present to the press; his interview printed on 9 July in the *Roswell Daily Record* was dismissed as, therefore, "a tissue of lies".

Next up were Stanton T Friedman and Don Berliner, with *Crash at Corona* (1992). The version of events on the Brazel ranch was much as Randle and Schmitt had them, except that the archæologists were transplanted back to the Plains of St Augustin, to witness the crashed remains of a second saucer, plus three dead and one surviving alien. A civilian visitor to Roswell saw the bodies from the Brazel ranch and was threatened with severe consequences by a red-headed colonel should he reveal anything. At the second site, witnesses were similarly threatened by a black sergeant and a red-headed captain. The wreckage Brig. Gen. Ramey displayed in his office for the press was a substitute for the real thing found by Brazel.

In 1994, Randle and Schmitt returned to the fray with *The Truth About the UFO Crash at Roswell*. The archæologists find themselves back on the Brazel ranch, but (unlike all previous versions) they are no longer headed by one Barney Barnett, and the St Augustin crash story "must be discarded". The date of the crash is now given as 4 July, and the UFO involved was an IFO – known to be ET: radars at White Sands Proving Ground had been monitoring UFO activity over New Mexico since 1 July. The malfunctioning craft bounced off Brazel's land and finally crashed into the base of a cliff about 35 miles (55km) north of Roswell. The machine was "narrow with batlike wings". There were four alien bodies, one reportedly still alive. As in previous versions, civilian witnesses were ejected from the scene when the military arrived in strength, this time with death threats to help seal their lips. Brazel did not find the wreckage on his land until 5 July; it featured hieroglyphic inscriptions and metal of unprecedented toughness.

SHIFTING SANDS, SHIFTY CHARACTERS

That's probably enough variations on the theme. The Roswell story can, even where it stood in 1994, be seen to be fluid. To some extent, this is because new witnesses came forward as time went by; but with dismal regularity they were exposed as hoaxers, fantasists, frauds or, to give them some wiggle-room, false-memory artists. Nonetheless, the succeeding versions, as they pick up and repeat even details from previously discredited sources, show signs of coalescing eventually into a broadly agreed account. Unfortunately, this can occur only at the expense of branding Mac Brazel the dupe or victim of the USAAF's addiction to secrecy, and contradicting the documented record, and (despite hours of interviews by investigators) writing Captain Cavitt's first-hand testimony out of the ufological record. When it did come to light in the USAF's hefty 1995 commentary on Roswell,[5] Cavitt's account was distinctly at odds with the ufologists' interpretation of events. The ufologists on the other hand *were* prepared to accept, initially, 'evidence' from 'witnesses' who emerged with increasingly specific and exotic stories only after the Roswell case had entered popular discourse. Which is not the standard historical method.



None of this in itself unequivocally establishes that the canonical version of the Roswell incident is legend rather than a disturbing fact nervously ignored by the guardians of official (un)truths. But consider this, from Peru in 1878, and reported by Nigel Watson:

A person who described himself as "A Seraro Chemist," told the South Pacific Times *of Callao, Peru, that he found a huge aerolite [a stony meteorite, composed mainly of silicates]. After digging through several layers of mineral substance he arrived at an inner chamber. Inside this he found the dead body of a 4½-foot tall alien and beside it was a silver plate that was inscribed with hieroglyphics. This writing indicated that the vehicle and its pilot had come from Mars…*

A similar story, in La Capital*, describes the discovery of an egg-shaped rock near the Carcarana River, Santa Fe, on 13 October 1877. Two geologists, Paxton and Davis, drilled into this curiosity and found "some cavities inside the hard rock. In one of them the men saw several objects such as a white, metallic hole-ridden amphora-like jar with many hieroglyphics engraved on its surface. Under the floor of this cavity they discovered another one which contained a 39 inch (1.2 metre) tall mummified body covered with a calciferous mass."*[6]

This latter story in turn has been traced to the 17 June 1864 edition of *La Pay*, which tells of a Paxton and Davis who made an identical discovery near "Pic James, Arrapahaya province" (presumably James Peak, Colorado, now in the Arapaho National Forest).[7] So the motifs of hieroglyphs, near-impenetrable materials and weeny ETs are far older than anything that happened (or didn't) in 1947. As Watson points out, these stories were possibly the template for the 1897 crashed-airship yarn from Aurora, Texas, which featured an "unknown" metal, hieroglyphics and a small dead Martian. Then we observe the descriptions of three landed or "gently pancaked" – not crashed – 'Venusian' saucers in Frank Scully's *Behind the Flying Saucers* (1950, pictured above), based on tall tales retailed by Messrs Silas Mason Newton and Leo A GeBauer, later to be convicted of fraud.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO GEBAUER

The first saucer had come down on a ranch 12 miles (20km) east of Aztec, New Mexico, in "a very rocky, high plateau territory". The USAF, having tracked the craft on "tenescopes" [*sic*],[8] were on the scene in short order and "immediately threw a guard around it". They found that "the materials used in the saucer had disclosed two metals unknown to us… Heat had not been able to melt one down, not even up to 10,000 degrees [Fahrenheit]… A dozen men could stand on it and not dent it; two men could raise up one end of the ship, it was that light", while "one ship had defied all effort to get inside of it, despite the use of $35,000 worth of diamond drills."

Curiously, however, one window had somehow got a hole in it – a proleptic form of the Roswell Paradox, whereat a saucer made of a super-strong metal nonetheless fragmented on contact with Mother Earth. Apparently, the Venusians didn't have the wit to make their windows as impenetrable as their hulls. Their saucer contained 16 dead 'men' ranging from 36 to 42 inches (90–107cm) in height; the medical division of the Air Force "had found that these little fellows were in all respects perfectly normal human beings, except for their teeth. There wasn't a cavity or a filling in any mouth. Their teeth were perfect." We shall return to those teeth next time. GeBauer also related that, inside the saucer, "We found some pamphlets or booklets, which in all probability dealt with navigation problems. However, we were unable to decipher any of the writing, which we judged to be a pictorial type of script. All of these booklets were turned over to certain officials of the Air Force…"

Those familiar with 'Roswell' but not acquainted with Scully's book may be excused for having an attack of *déjà vu*. Even before that, we have seen certain motifs trickle down the years, starting with aerolites, through airships, to flying saucers in remote corners of New Mexico. Scully, whose preface is a classic corybantic rant against government secrecy, introduces the military response and quarantine into the legend. And there the legend lay, undeveloped, with no case research, for more than two decades. Why so? Scully's book was comprehensively debunked, and his two informants exposed as crooks, by *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter John P Cahn in two devastating *True* magazine articles (Sept 1952/Aug 1956); and ufologists prudently decided that crash/retrieval reports were about as enticing as a holiday in Stalin's Lubianka. Yet today Aztec hosts an annual UFO-crash conference, much to the benefit of the town library, and ufology is awash with similar stories.

In Part Two, we'll see how this sea-change came about, and what it all means.

NOTES

[1] List of 122 saucer crashes: http://bit.ly/n1S10e (burlingtonnews.net); list of 272 crashes: http://bit.ly/uyAX9a (cseti.org – Center For the Study of Extraterrestrial Intelligence); list of 51 Soviet-era crashes: http://bit.ly/n1S10e (burlingtonnews.net), and (in Russian) http://bit.ly/rVcpRo (ufo-cather.nm.ru). Warning to the unwary: the crash that occurred in 10,000 BC is the 'Dropa Stones' hoax, documentation for which appeared no earlier than 1960. See http://bit.ly/vYKmv5 (badarchaeology.wordpress.com), and David Gamon's 1995 'confession' in **FT75:57**. CSETI's general reliability may be gauged from their assertions that their "interest in this matter stems from the fact that Earth is being visited by ET's [*sic*] with benign intentions who are currently being tracked, targeted and shot down by covert forces operating outside democratic controls" and "At least three nations on Earth now have their own electro-gravitic 'flying saucers.'"

[2] See http://bit.ly/iMAH5g (dspace.dial.pipex.com) for fatalities (figures apply only until 2000), and for airline accident statistics based on 1986–2010 data, see http://bit.ly/eR2LTG (planecrashinfo.com).

[3] Timothy R Tangherlini: "'It Happened Not Too Far from Here…': A Survey of Legend Theory and Characterization", *Western Folklore* 49.4 (Oct 1990).

[4] Ernst Bernheim: *Einleitung in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1928.

[5] *The Roswell Report: Fact vs. Fiction in the New Mexico Desert*, United States Air Force, 1995.

[6] Nigel Watson: "Down to Earth – UFO Investigation 1897 Style", *Magonia* 44 (Oct 1992); available at http://bit.ly/tM8C8s (magonia.haaan.com).

[7] Fabio Picasso: "Infrequent Types of South American humanoids", *Strange* 8 (Fall 1991), cited by Watson, *op. cit.* [and available on the web as a bootleg PDF: http://bit.ly/tuzh5K (ignaciodarnaude.com)].

[8] A 'tenescope' was a device, known only to the imagination of GeBauer, for detecting magnetic activity at a distance. According to him, saucers fly by exploiting magnetic forces. A slightly garbled text of Scully's book is downloadable by going to http://bit.ly/tAHS48 (opus-net.org). Here one may find much entertainment at GeBauer's crackpot ideas on magnetism and other scientific matters.

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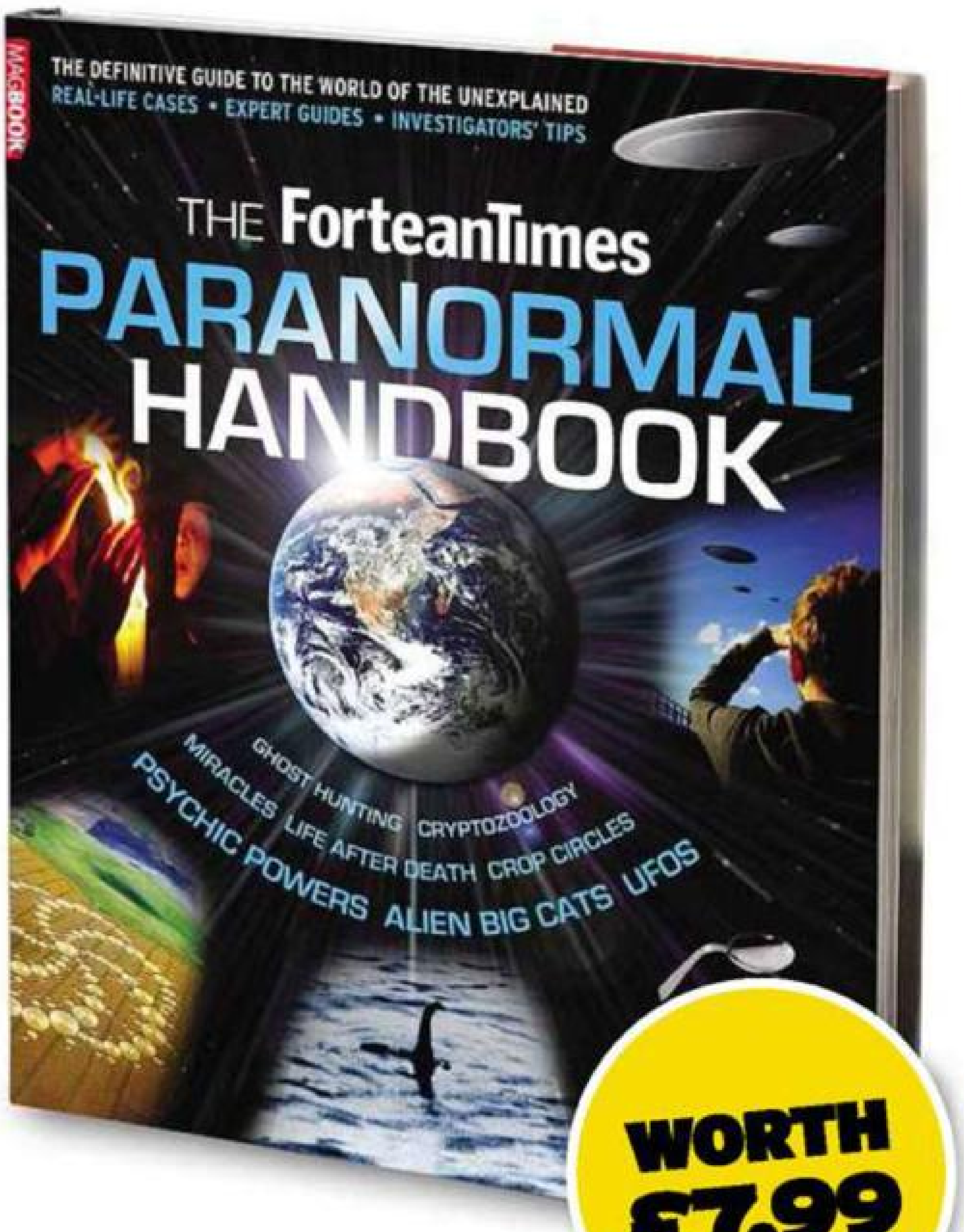
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Double standards?

GORDON RUTTER wonders why some self-proclaimed 'skeptics', who usually decry anecdotal evidence, are quite happy to accept it when it supports their own world view.

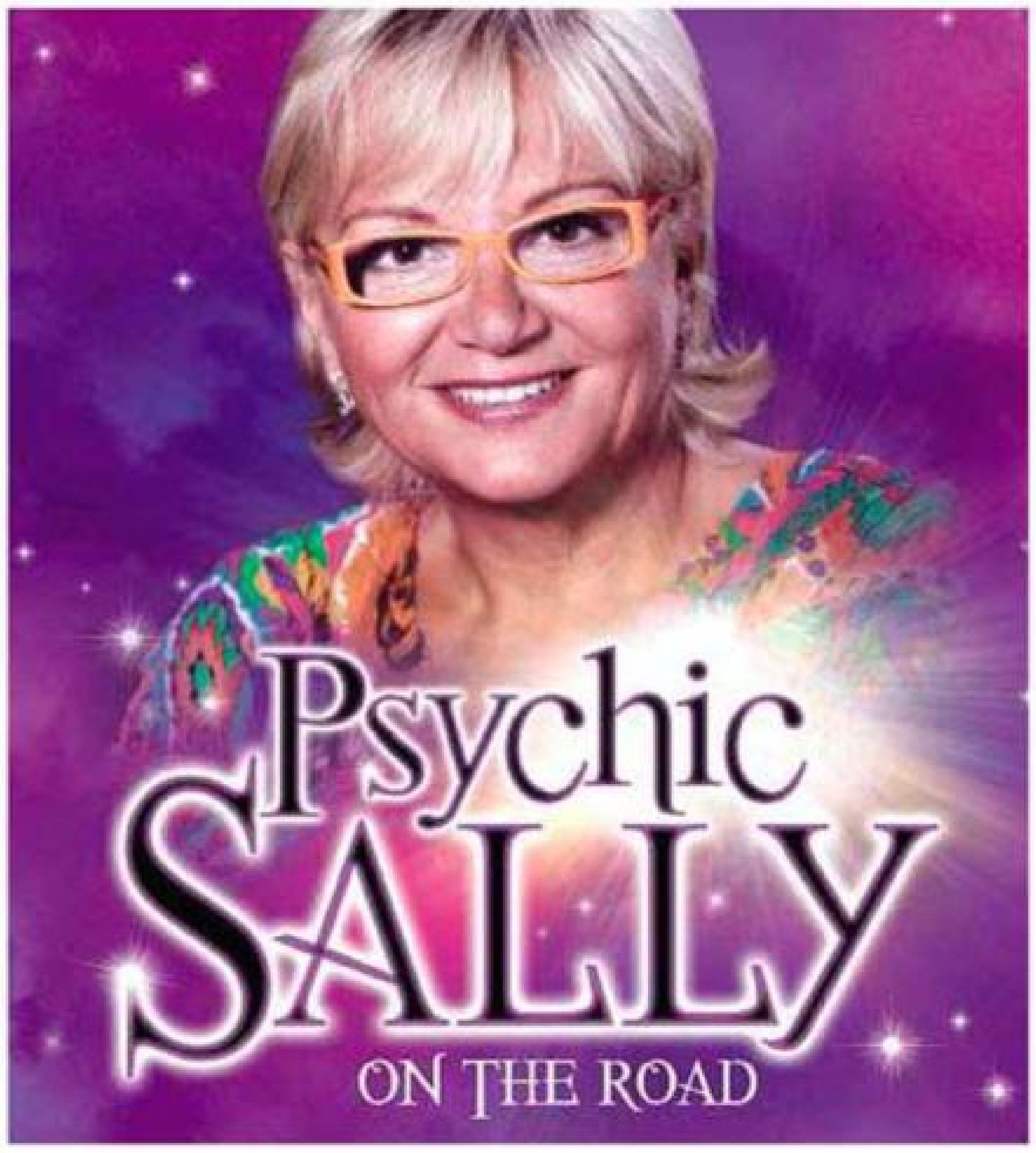
GORDON RUTTER is a freelance writer and lecturer based in Edinburgh. He is a regular *FT* correspondent and organises the Edinburgh Fortean Society.

On 11 September 2011, Sally Morgan, "Britain's Best-Loved Psychic" (at least according to her website), played the Grand Canal Theatre, Dublin, as part of a 175-date tour playing to an estimated 250,000 people.

The following day, one of the audience members, named in reports only as "Sue", contacted *Liveline* on RTE Radio 1 (an Irish radio station)[1] – and what she said came as a bit of a surprise to Psychic Sally (insert your own jokes here).

"Sue" and her friends were sitting at the back of the theatre when they heard voices. No, not those sort of voices; these ones came from a projection booth with an open window behind where Sue and her pals were sitting. And what they heard the voices saying, Psychic Sally was repeating on stage a few seconds later! When a member of staff noticed, the window was hurriedly closed.

"Sue" was convinced that what she had heard was an accomplice transmitting information to the onstage psychic. As Chris French pointed out in his *Guardian* newspaper blog,[2] this was pretty similar to the 1986 scenario in which Peter Popoff was exposed by James Randi.[3] Popoff had been using a radio receiver to hear information transmitted by his wife – information that had been obtained by reading prayer cards filled in by the audience before they entered the auditorium. Randi and investigator Alexander Jason used a scanner to listen in to the radio broadcasts, which they recorded and played back on the popular Johnny Carson chat show. The evidence was used to denounce Popoff as a fake, and shortly afterwards he filed for bankruptcy. Naturally, the two cases are being compared by the sceptics and used as conclusive proof that Sally Morgan is a fake.



I'll be honest. I've never seen any of Sally Morgan's TV shows, or read any of her books, or attended any of her stage appearances. But, for the purposes of this article, I'm not actually interested in her psychic abilities, or lack thereof. No – at the moment, I am more interested in the way that some 'skeptics' have seized on this case.

We are really quite tired of hearing from many in the skeptical camp that "the plural of anecdote is not data". This skeptical mantra itself seems to be a misquotation of the original, in which Raymond Wolfinger said that "the plural of anecdote *is* data" (my emphasis). However, I digress.

So, the plural of anecdote is not data – we can't just take someone's word for it; we need proof. I'm happy with this, as far as it goes (although if someone asserts that a certain thing happened, we can't simply dismiss this out of hand; the claim should be investigated, and if the evidence is found wanting then said claim can, at least, be put on the back burner).

In the case of Randi and Popoff, the evidence is there – a tape recording of Popoff's wife and a video of the performance, and the two can be married together. Proof positive. But with regard to "Britain's Best Loved Psychic", where is the evidence? All we have is an anecdote. A woman known only as "Sue" claims that she heard someone passing information to Morgan, and that this information was then presented as evidence for communication with the afterlife. And, based on this *anecdote*, some sceptics are claiming definitive proof of Morgan's fraudulent abilities.

Let's turn this around for a moment. Someone, giving only their first name, phones a radio show to say that they saw the Loch Ness Monster. Would the sceptics accept this as evidence and admit to the reality of Nessie? Of course they wouldn't. Yet they're quite happy to accept an anecdote as evidence when it fits with their already-formed worldview. At best, this is a bit hypocritical.

I'm reminded of Charles Fort's oft-quoted words: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while". Accept things when the evidence is there – and when new (equally or more valid) evidence comes along, modify your ideas. It's called science. Of course, there will be appeals to Occam's razor, but a single statement from an anonymous witness is *not* conclusive proof that someone is a fraud.

And one final entry in the case of Psychic Sally: as part of her tour, she visited Liverpool, at which point she was invited by Simon Singh and the Merseyside Skeptics Society to attend a test which would be the first step in her claiming Randi's famous million dollar psychic prize. She didn't attend, and Singh received quite a lot of correspondence from her lawyer about his alleged harassment of her.[4]

I'm not saying all skeptics are cut from the same cloth, just some of the more vocal ones. And as for evidence for or against Sally Morgan's abilities, I prefer mine a bit more concrete than an anonymous witness statement.

So, is the plural of anecdote data? Well if you're a skeptic, it would appear to depend on whether or not the anecdote agrees with your skeptical world view… FT

NOTES

[1] http://tgr.ph/opcWlg (telegraph.co.uk).

[2] http://bit.ly/rtzt58 (guardian.co.uk).

[3] These days, Popoff has returned to psychic healing and channelling voices of the dead; Randi's account of the investigation and unmasking can be viewed at http://bit.ly/stqe77 (youtube.com).

[4] http://slsingh.posterous.com.

Our believing brains

Why do human beings persist in believing in the supernatural, despite a complete lack of scientific evidence for everything from God to UFOs? Perhaps, argues LAWRENCE R SAMUEL, it's because we are hardwired to do so, as new evidence from neuroscience suggests.

LAWRENCE R SAMUEL is an author, founder of Culture Planning, a US consultancy to Fortune 500 companies, and was a Smithsonian Institution Fellow.

Belief in the supernatural or paranormal – phenomena that cannot be explained by natural laws or understood in terms of scientific knowledge – is a widespread and enduring dimension of the human experience, part of who we are as a species. Scholars from various fields over the years have presented compelling arguments for why this might be so, and recent neuroscience research suggests that humans are 'hardwired' to believe in the supernatural and to make other leaps of faith. If these beliefs are indeed woven into our very biology – which they appear to be – humans will no doubt continue to experience such things as their 'sixth sense' and to have encounters with the beyond.

Ghosts, psychics, and various other expressions of the supernatural are everywhere you look these days. But why are we so interested in things that are not 'real' – things we can't see, hear, or touch? The material world is apparently not enough for us, and this is something that surely warrants further investigation. What is especially intriguing is that interest in the 'paranormal' has, if anything, increased rather than diminished over recent years. Given the ascent of science and technology over this same period, this is surprising; expectations were that the rationalism of the 20th century would do away with the mystical and superstitious ways of the past. Instead, however, the supernatural appears to have run on a parallel course with science and technology, the two often seeming to feed off each other. The more we go down the scientific and technological path, the more we appear to need the supernatural; could the "primitiveness" and universality of supernatural belief satisfy some sort of basic human drive?

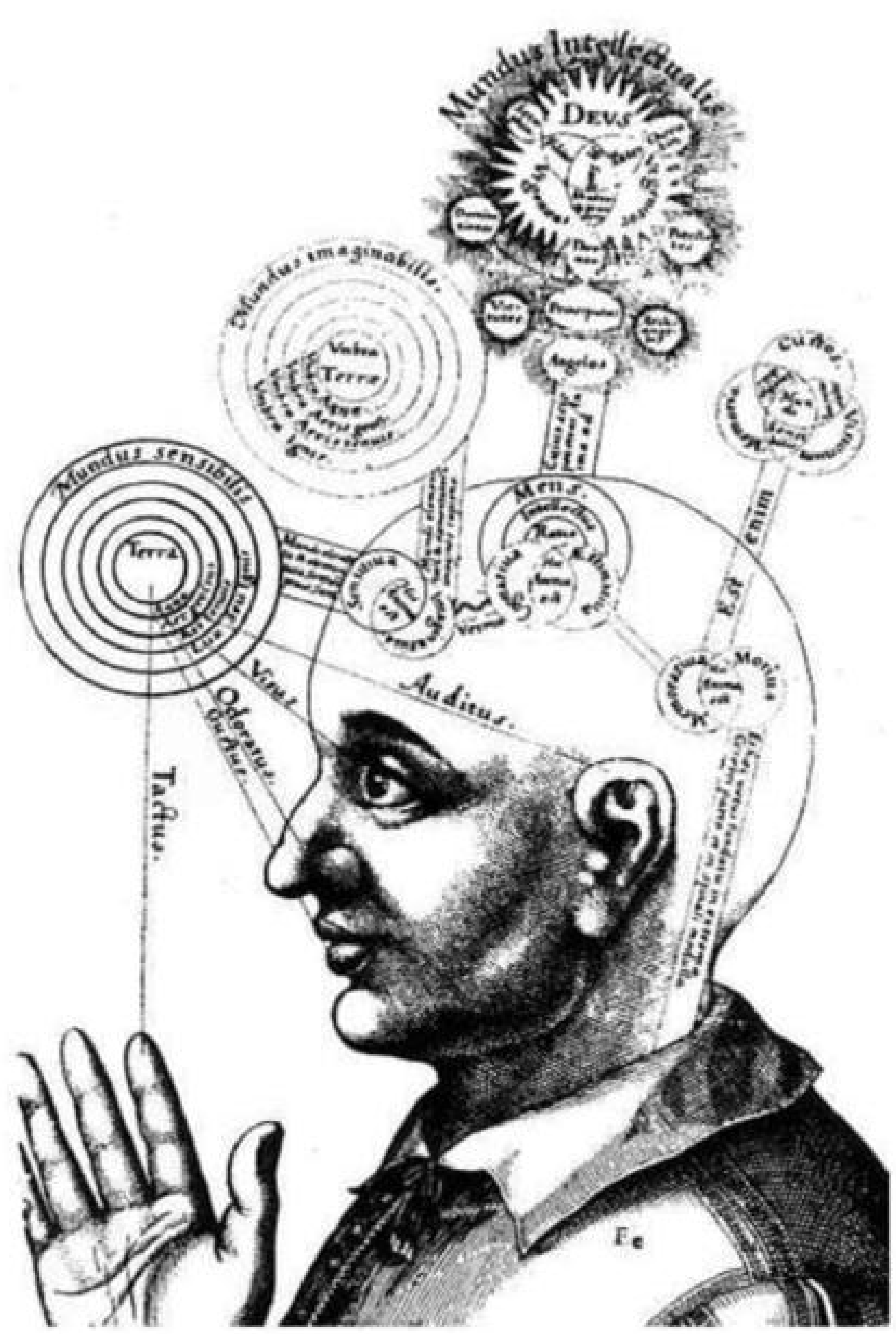
The need to recognise the presence of a different and possibly higher plane of existence or consciousness is a universal dimension of the human experience; belief in the supernatural obviously serves an important purpose. "Our minds are designed from the very start to think there are unseen patterns, forces, and essences inhabiting the world, and it is unlikely that any effort to get rid of supernatural beliefs, or the superstitious behaviours that accompany them, will be successful," writes Bruce Hood, a University of Bristol psychology professor, in his *SuperSense: Why We Believe in the Unbelievable*, arguing that "these common beliefs and sacred values are essential in binding us together as a society because they help us to see ourselves connected to each other at a deeper level." [1]

Psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have all put forward theories to explain, as Michael Shermer expressed in the title of his book, *Why People Believe Weird Things*. Shermer, founding publisher of *Skeptic* magazine and a high-profile non-believer in the supernatural, takes the traditional 'skeptical' view: filled with uncertainty, the argument goes, life can often be frightening, leading many to gravitate to what Shermer considers "pseudoscience, superstition, and other confusions of our time". Belief in an afterlife or some kind of 'grand design' is comforting and reassuring, bringing order to a scary Universe. Mythologies, religions, and the occult all have roots in the pre-scientific age, Shermer argues, and faith in some kind of god or spiritual plane of existence laid the foundation for the contemporary interest in everything from ESP and UFOs to ghosts. [2]

Anthropologists also offer reasons as to "why we believe". Evolution, some have suggested, has conditioned us to make the assumption that things are alive, even when we're not quite sure – it being a far better survival strategy to assume that the big, brown formation over yonder is a hungry bear rather than just a rock. Thinking that the thing that just went bump in the night is a ghost instead of rusty pipes could thus very well be instinctive, one more reason we shouldn't be surprised when people accept the supernatural as real. Control, too – or the lack of it – underlies many of our supernatural beliefs, anthropologists argue. "In the absence of perceived control, people become susceptible to detecting patterns in an effort to regain some sense of organisation," says Hood: the mind actively seeks explanations and meanings. Anxiety or economic distress create even more of a need for people to feel in control, it's argued, thus explaining the consistent spike in paranormalism experienced during times of social/political turmoil. "Perceptually, the world is chronically ambiguous and requires an interpretation," sums up Stewart Guthrie, professor emeritus of anthropology at Fordham University and author of *Faces in the Clouds*, thus accounting for everything from the Virgin-Mary-in-the-burrito phenomenon to the "peak experience" Apollo 14 astronaut Edgar Mitchell reported while in space in 1971. [3]

John F Schumaker, author of *Wings of Illusion*, echoes this anthropological view. "Magic, religion, and all forms of reality distortion are simply species-specific responses unique to the human animal," he argues – an adaptive technique to help humans deal with the not very appealing idea that life is "chaos followed by oblivion". Normal intelligence is simply not enough, but humans are capable of suspending reason and logic in order to construct different kinds of mythologies. Creating such 'illusions' provides self-worth, meaningfulness, and power, functioning as a kind of 'counter-intelligence'. To Schumaker, suggestibility is the "most fascinating of all human characteristics", and one that makes us different from all other forms of life. [4]

It is now scientists, however, who are offering the most cogent explanation for humans' unshakable belief in the supernatural. As brain research evolves, the dots between supernaturalism and biology are being connected, providing hard evidence for the theories posed by psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists. In their *Why God Won't Go Away*, Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili, and Vince Rause explore the relationship between metaphysical experiences and brain function. There is a "persistent and peculiarly human longing to connect with something larger than ourselves", the authors



ABOVE: *Ventricular and sensory harmonies*, by Robert Fludd, c.1620.

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

"Mystical experience is biologically real," they say

argue, an inherent desire for a deeper consciousness that transcends time and space. Most scientists ignore or flatly reject anecdotal 'data', as it is considered unreliable and speculative; but brain scans reveal a direct link between prayer, meditation, mystical experiences, and neurological activity. "Mystical experience is biologically, observably, and scientifically real," the three hold; this is the reason why such experience is seemingly as old as the human species itself and common to all civilisations. Transcending the material world via mythologies, religions, and other forms of supernaturalism can be viewed as a kind of "biology of belief" they argue, concluding that neuroscience research suggests that "spiritual experience, at its very root, is intimately interwoven with human biology".[5]

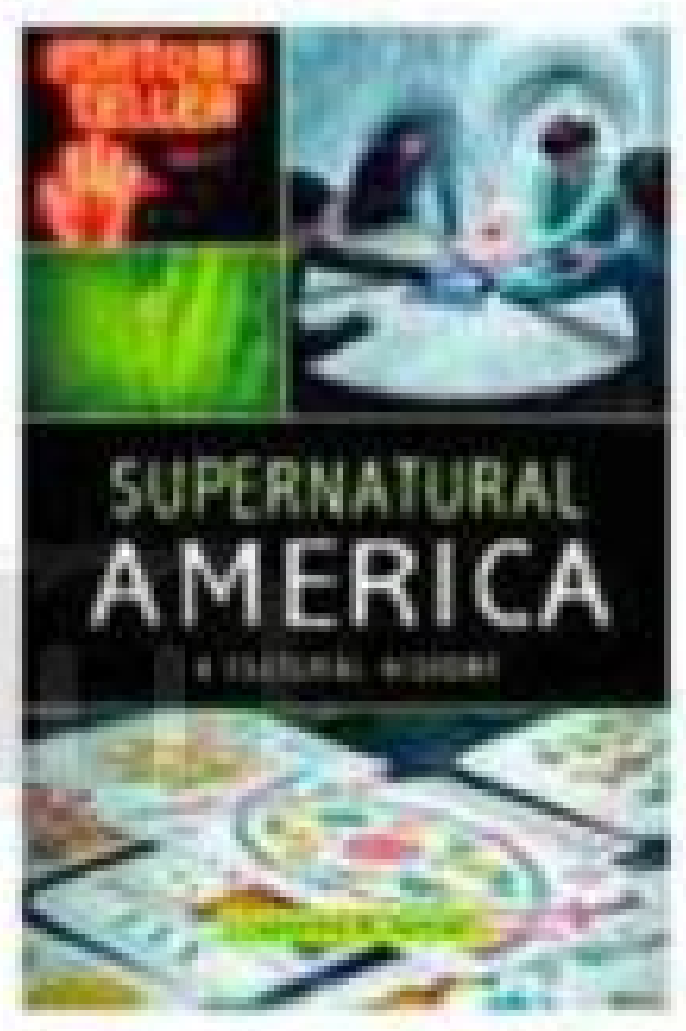
Bruce Hood makes the most convincing argument that paranormalism is anything but extraordinary, part and parcel of how the normal mind works. Basing his theory on research conducted by cognitive scientists like himself (and borrowing earlier ideas from both believers like Rupert Sheldrake and non-believers like Ray Hyman), Hood argues that the belief in phenomena that cannot be explained by the laws of physics or biology derives from the same mental processes that are responsible for basic reasoning and perception. From early childhood, the brain is programmed to fill in the blanks and identify patterns in random data, he suggests, routinely translating sketchy or scattered information into coherent terms. The mind is "designed to infer invisible structures in the world", Hood writes, our 'supersense' being a "natural product of the human brain". This hardwiring is how and why we attach meaning to the inexplicable, accounting for the pervasive belief in the supernatural. Thinking that something which looked or sounded like a ghost *is a ghost* is just your mind doing its job, as Hood makes clear – even though it doesn't mean that a ghost was actually there.[6]

In his recent book *The Believing Brain*, Michael Shermer expands his discussion of how and why we translate strange and seemingly otherworldly experiences into 'truths' by adding findings from neuroscience into the equation. "How does one make sense of a supernatural occurrence with natural explanations?" he asks – and finds the answer residing in the workings of the human brain. According to Shermer, we have a "believing neuron", which means that our beliefs in everything from the afterlife to God to aliens operates at the cellular level.[7] Peter Brugger, a neuroscientist, has proposed that it is the chemical neurotransmitter dopamine that is responsible for humans' ability to detect coincidences and see patterns. The brain utilises networks of connected cells that communicate with each other via chemical neurotransmitters like dopamine, which affects perception. The difference between a believer in the supernatural and a non-believer could thus be down to their relative levels of dopamine.[8]

Finally, Sharon Begley, co-author of *The Mind and the Brain*, also supports the idea that, as she puts it, "[B]elief in the paranormal reflects normal brain activity carried to an extreme". Feeling a ghostly presence, thinking you are the reincarnation of Cleopatra or hearing loved ones speak to you after they have died are all the perfectly normal workings of the human mind, she explains, with more and more scientists coming to this conclusion. Religious faith, another human near-universal, is also part of this process, research suggests; perhaps biology accounts for why 90 per cent of American adults simply dismiss the fact that there is no empirical evidence of God. "The idea that the brain constructs reality from the bottom up, starting with perceptions, is woefully wrong, new research shows," Begley writes. The power of hope appears to be a particularly strong factor in shaping what we think we see and hear. "The brain's sensory regions, including vision, are at the mercy of higher-order systems, such as those that run attention and emotions," she continues, and people are prone to effectively blinding themselves in situations where they do not really want to see something.[9]

In short, some kind of 'supersense' appears to be a fundamental part of our DNA, quite literally. "The universal human need to find meaning and purpose in life is stronger and more basic than any attachment to empiricism, logic or objective reality," Begley concludes, convinced that "we are more irrational than we are rational."[10] Hardwired into our biology, the supernatural will continue to be an essential dimension of the human experience. FT

This article is based on the book *Supernatural America: A Cultural History*, by Lawrence R Samuel, Praeger Publishers Inc, 2011.



NOTES

1 Bruce M Hood: *SuperSense: Why We Believe in the Unbelievable*, HarperOne, New York, 2009.

2 Michael Shermer: *Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time*, WH Freeman, New York, 1997, pp1–8.

3 Stewart Elliot Guthrie: *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993.

4 John F Schumaker: *Wings of Illusion: The Origin, Nature and Future of Paranormal Belief*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, New York, 1990, pp14–37.

5 Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili, & Vince Rause: *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*, Ballantine, New York, 2001, pp1–10.

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7 Michael Shermer: *The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies – How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths*, Times Books, New York, 2011, p15.

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9 Sharon Begley: "Why We Believe", *Newsweek*, 3 Nov 2008, pp56–60; see also Jeffrey M Schwartz & Sharon Begley: *The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force*, Harper, New York, 2002.

10 Begley, *op cit*.

A time to remember

ROB GANDY had an episode of "missing time" while mending his bicycle – but, as he explains, it was really a case of "missing memory" or Transient Global Amnesia...

ROB GANDY is a management consultant living on the Wirral. He has written previously in *FT* on a Scouse doppelgänger, an ambient musician and Liverpudlian ghostlore.

Sunday, 3 December 2006 was a date to remember – it was the day I lost my memory.

At the time, I had been undergoing a period of significant stress: two of my sons were buying houses in different parts of Yorkshire; I was writing up my PhD; I was concerned about my mother's health, regularly travelling a 150-mile (240km) round trip to see her; and, as a management consultant, I was undertaking a number of projects in a field where you're "only as good as your last job".

My middle son's house was a bike ride from the hospital where he would be working and rather than risk the theft of his expensive mountain bike, I decided to let him have my old "sit up and beg". I checked the bike in my garage and the tyres were both flat, so I started to pump them up. One was fine, but as the other did not inflate, I adopted the method of checking a flat tyre from my youth: i.e. vigorously pump it up and if it starts to inflate but then deflates you have a slow puncture which can be easily mended; if there is no inflation at all then the tyre is beyond repair. A couple of energetic attempts to inflate said tyre, bent over in rather cramped conditions, confirmed that a new tyre was required. So I tidied up and went inside the house to where my wife Margaret was in the kitchen, and began washing my hands. "Please can you get a new inner tube when you next go past the bike shop?" I asked her. She agreed and began making a note in her diary.

"Oh," she asked, "what size inner tube do you need?"

"Why are you asking about an inner tube?" I responded.

"Because you've just asked me to buy one because one of the ones you have been pumping up in the garage has a hole in it".

In that split second my memory had gone. I could not remember discussing the purchase of the inner tube seconds previously, nor could I remember having been in the garage working on the bike.

Margaret led me into the next room where a copy of the Sunday paper was on the table. I recognised it, and asked how it had got there. She replied that I had been to the shops and bought it myself. I could not remember doing this at all. Naturally, Margaret was starting to get worried, and asked me if I remembered going to a Geno Washington concert with friends two days beforehand. I had no recollection (and let's face it, you don't quickly forget a Geno Washington gig!).

Fearing that I had had a minor stroke, Margaret sat me down and went to get our coats to take me to hospital. During what could have only been a minute, I must have momentarily dozed off, because I thought that both my sons who lived in Yorkshire had come to visit me. When Margaret returned, I realised that I must have dreamed or imagined their visit, and got ready to go to hospital.

To cut a long story short, I underwent a series of tests over a number of hours which determined that there was nothing wrong with me. During this time, my memory slowly started to return, and in the end I just wanted to go home. A few days later, I returned to hospital and underwent a brain scan (much to Margaret's surprise they found that I did have one!). Everything was fine and the consultant advised me that I had experienced Transient Global Amnesia (TGA), which he described as likely to be caused by some fatty substance temporarily blocking connections in my brain and then dispersing. I was unlikely to experience it again.

In that split second, my memory had gone – I did not remember

Ironically, the only thing that the hospital did find was that my cholesterol level was comparatively high and they recommended to my GP that I should start taking statins to reduce it. By comparison, *FT* contributor Gail-Nina Anderson suspected that taking statins might have actually *contributed* to her TGA episode, when she lost 20 minutes while giving a reading at an event (**FT252:53**).

Why am I describing part of my personal medical history? I am doing so because I think that Gail-Nina was very close to the truth when she joked that if she had been on a dark lonely road when she experienced TGA, she would be able to attribute the time lapse to aliens. Hodges and Warlow[1] defined the diagnostic criteria for TGA, for the purposes of clinical research, in part as follows:

The attack was witnessed by a capable observer and reported as being a definite loss of recent memory (retrograde amnesia).

There was an absence of clouding of consciousness or other cognitive impairment other than amnesia.

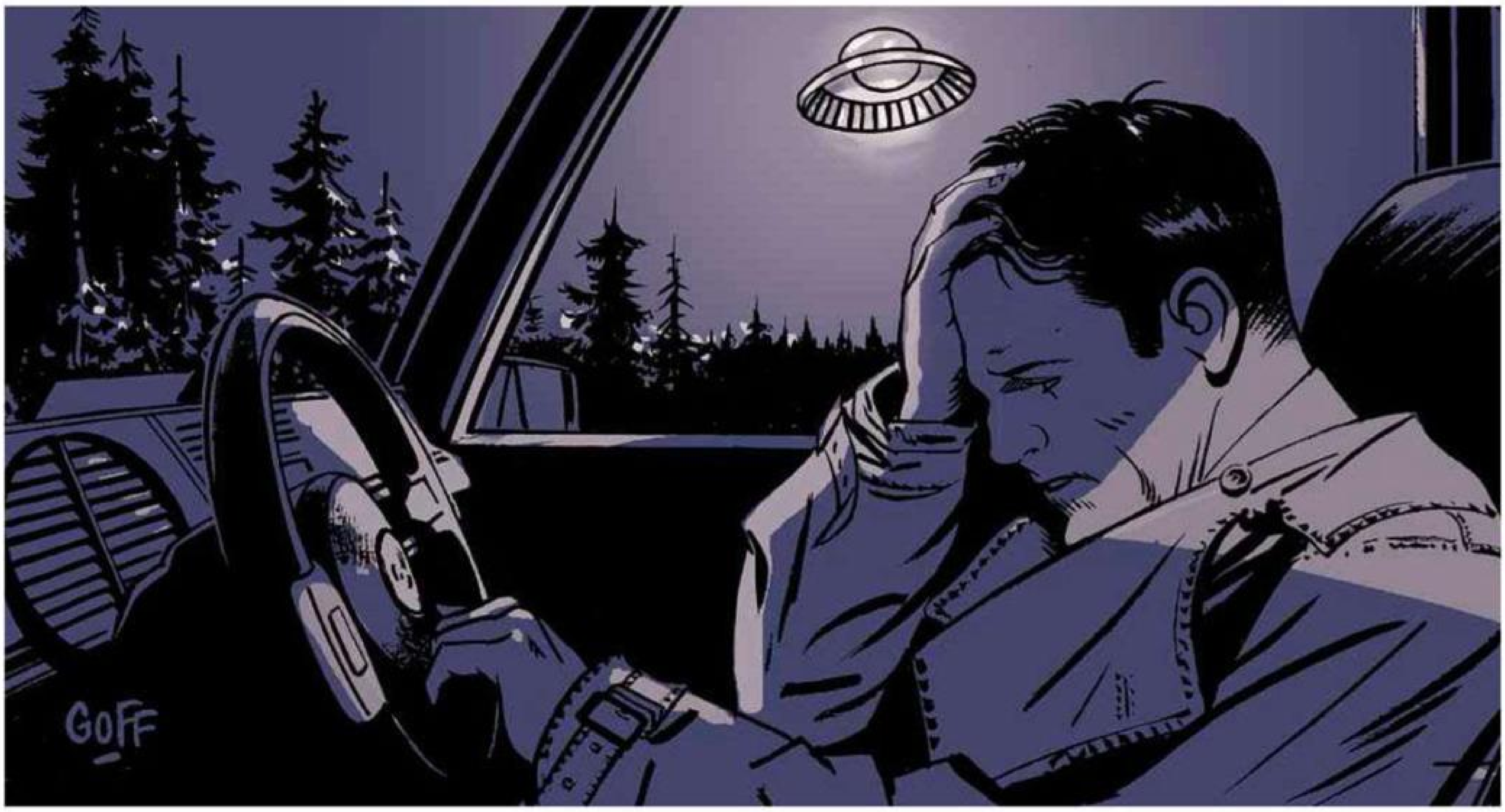
There were no focal neurological signs or deficits during or after the attack.

There were no features of epilepsy, or active epilepsy in the past two years, and the patient did not have any recent head injury.

The attack resolved within 24 hours.

All of the above applied to me, with Margaret acting as the "capable observer". But if she had not been present, I would simply not have remembered what I had done. Had I been alone in familiar surroundings I might have carried on my mundane activities without realising any memory loss had occurred – but in different circumstances I might have experienced it as a loss of time.

Someone travelling alone, particularly at night, and experiencing a TGA would inevitably feel confusion. My own experience is that it happens in an instant and you do not remember anything for a given period before, despite being completely *compos mentis.* A stereotypical event in ufology is that someone is driving through the countryside at night when their car enters



GÉRARD GOFFAUX

a luminous cloud, or similar; then the driver finds himself miles further down the road with half an hour missing. All of the above diagnostic criteria can be applied to such a situation, except the involvement of an independent witness. Subsequently, under hypnosis, the experiencer remembers that he or she was abducted by aliens and taken on board a spaceship.

A number of commentators have argued that many, if not all, perceived UFOs are actually forms of rare meteorological phenomena. Therefore, my speculative interpretation of these events is that they *do* involve rare meteorological phenomena and these phenomena can induce TGA in humans who get too close to them. Any buildings and cars that are passed during the "lost" period of the journey are simply forgotten. How this impact actually occurs is open to debate, but if such phenomena have an electrical element, and can cause pressure/ physical effects, then it is not unreasonable to assume that they can influence an individual's neurological circuits on a temporary basis. It would follow that if more than one person gets too close, then the phenomena can have the same, or similar, effect on all of them.

Therefore, the examples that Jenny Randles gives of "time storms" (**FT240:40–44**) – a strange cloud impacting on travellers in Tibet and a Lancashire woman approached by misty lights – could be reinterpreted as episodes of TGA induced by meteorological phenomena, rather than distortions in time.

John B Collins lost half an hour driving home one night (**FT267:73**). This might have involved meteorological phenomena or might have been an example of spontaneous TGA.

Estimates have been made of the annual incidence of TGA: it varies from a minimum of 2.9 cases per 100,000 population (Spain) and 5.2 per 100,000 (USA),[2] but among people aged over 50, the rate of TGA incidence is reported to range from approximately 23 per 100,000 (in a US population) to 32 per 100,000 (in a population in Scandinavia).[3] Therefore, TGA is certainly not uncommon and it should not be surprising that people affected by it should seek an explanation. Most will be seen and treated by doctors, will accept the TGA diagnosis and be reassured that it is unlikely to happen again. However, those who do not see a doctor for whatever reason (and some of those that do) may interpret the episode within their own world view, or the world view of people with whom they might discuss the episode.

It is virtually impossible not to have heard stories of alien abductions, either as fiction or claimed as fact, through films, television, books and other media; it's inevitable that they will be included in some interpretations of events, consciously or subconsciously, by either the subject or the interrogator. Clearly, I had a TGA episode, but if my wife had not been present and I had not gone to hospital, I might have believed that somehow my eldest two sons had teleported home from Yorkshire for a short visit.

In conclusion, while clocks are used to measure time, our perception of time depends upon our memories to some extent. I surmise that most, if not all, reported episodes of lost time are not "lost time" but "lost memory", and suggest that there are rare meteorological phenomena that can induce memory loss on a temporary basis. I am not in a position to revisit the many examples of lost time in the literature, so I leave it to readers to see if my hypothesis can provide an alternative and feasible interpretation of them. FT

NOTES

[1] JR Hodges & CP Warlow: "Syndromes of transient amnesia: towards a classification. A study of 153 cases", *Journal of neurology, neurosurgery, and psychiatry* 53 (10): 834–43, 1990.

[2] Roy Sucholeiki: "Transient Global Amnesia", *eMedicine*, Medscape, 3 Dec 2008; http://bit.ly/awjJC (emedicine.medscape.com). Retrieved 19 Oct 2009.

[3] JW Miller; R Petersen; E Metter; C Millikan & T Yanagihara: "Transient global amnesia: Clinical characteristics and prognosis", *Neurology* 37 (5): 733, 1987; Koski & RJ Marttila: "Transient global amnesia: incidence in an urban population", *Acta neurologica Scandinavica* 81 (4): 358–60, 1990.

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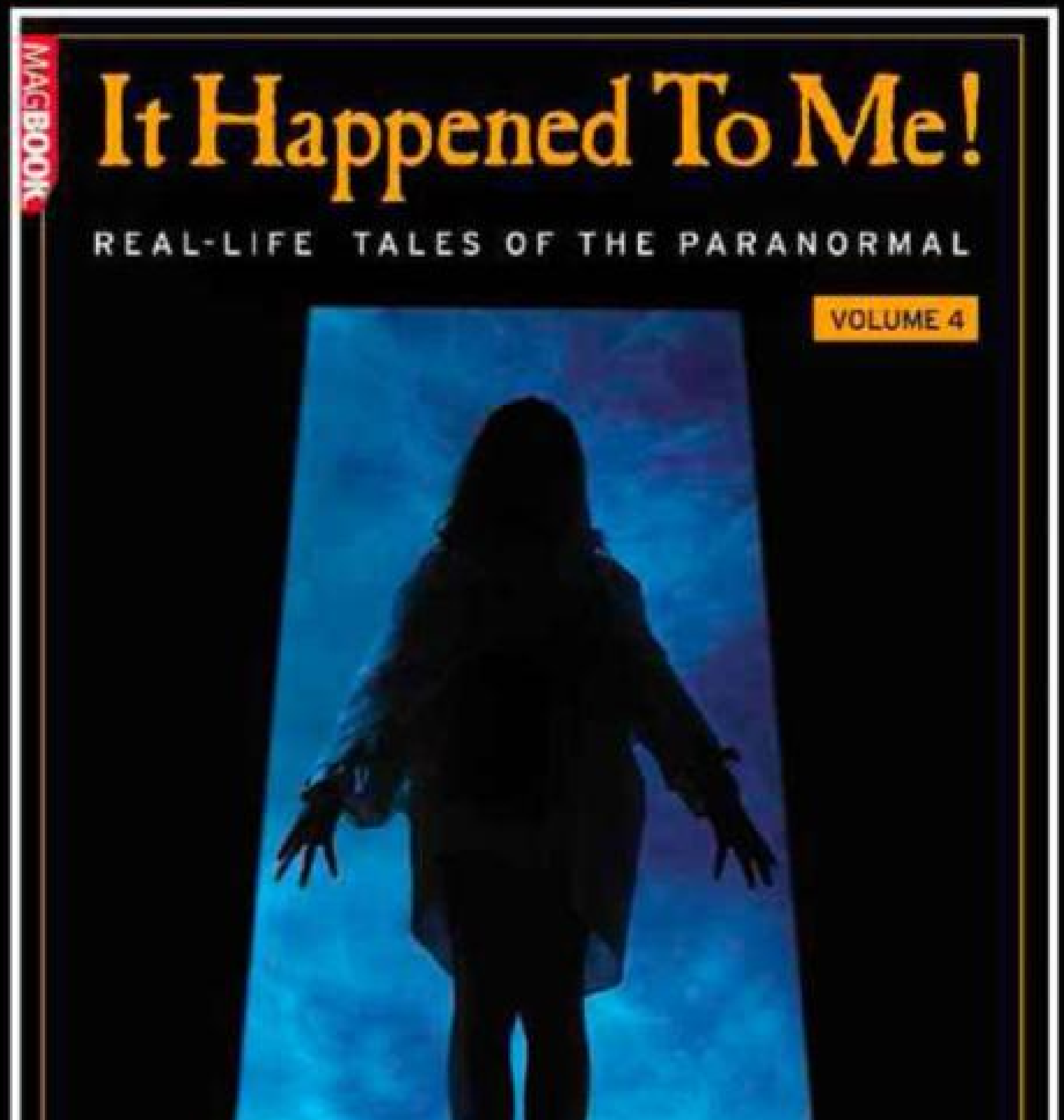

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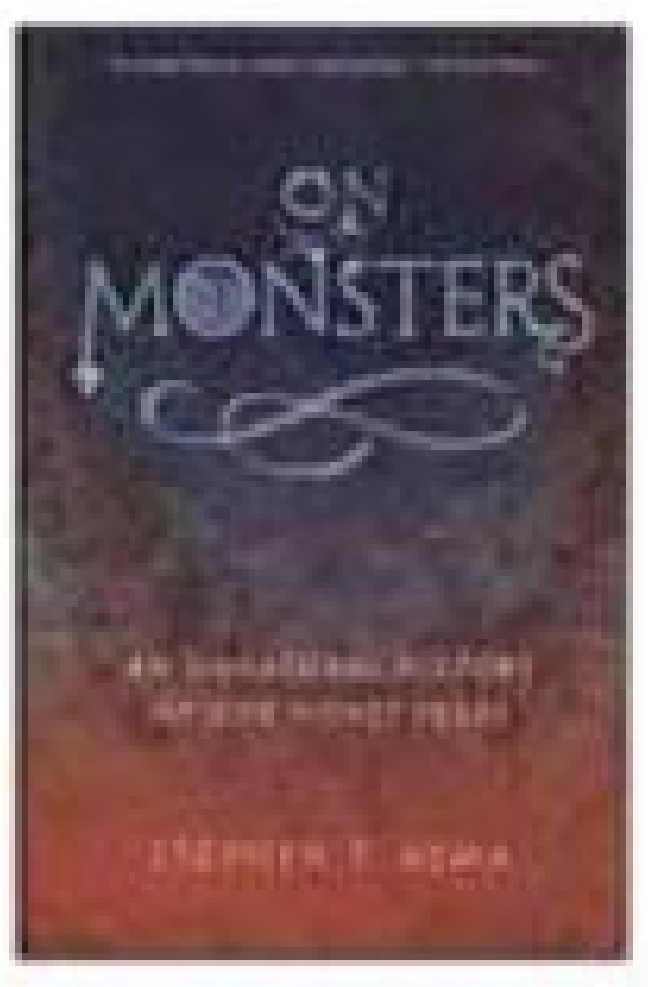
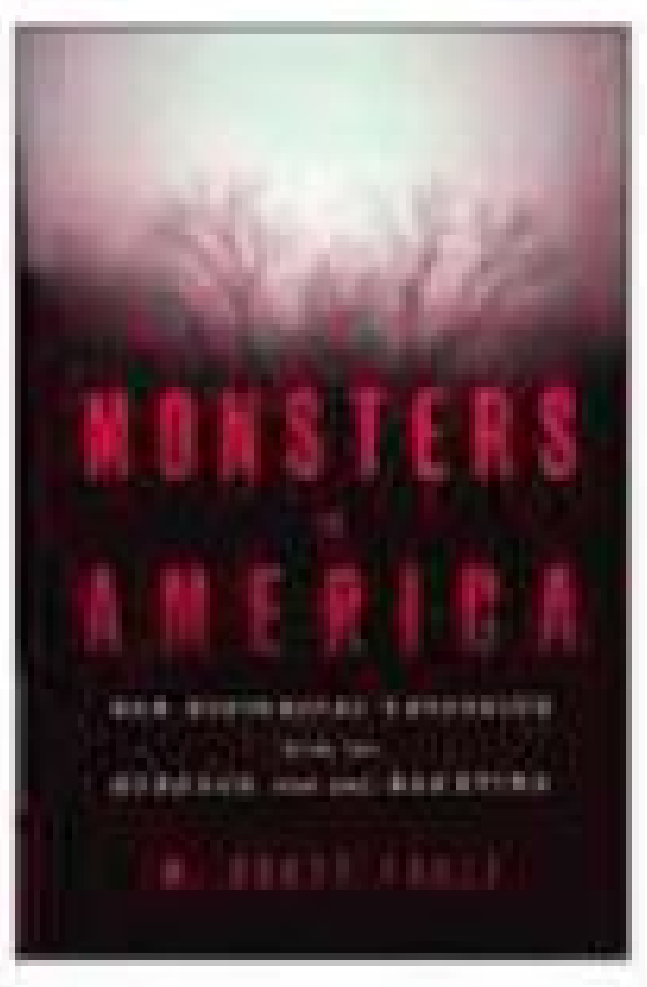
reviews

Don't stare, dear – it's rude

The difference between hero and monster is one of point of view, or possibly opportunity; alternatively, monsters are for mass entertainment and nothing more





On Monsters

An unnatural history of our worst fears

Stephen T Asma

Oxford University Press 2009

Hb, 351pp, illus, notes, ind, £19.00,
ISBN 9780195336160

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.00

Monsters in America

Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting

W Scott Poole

Baylor University Press 2011

Hb, 277pp, notes, ind, $29.95/£24.99,
ISBN 9781602583146

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.49

Early in this excellent study, Stephen Asma tells of visiting the Khmer Rouge's notorious S21 prison, where 17,000 Cambodians were tortured to death. His guide was 10 when she was taken from her family to work, starving, in fields. She did not know what happened to them. Contemplating the bloodstained floor of a cell, Asma wonders "how she could come to this wretched place day after day and offer tours of events that had shred[ded] her own life [..] I didn't understand any of it."

Asma writes beautifully and simply; he uses stories from his own life of study and teaching in far-flung countries, as he guides the reader through the perplexing nature of humanity. But it's not an understanding that comes easily: where there are monsters, there are also heroes; and heroes can be monstrous and monsters heroic. It is a characteristic of the monstrous, concludes Asma, that it has moved beyond rationality and our ability to comprehend the emotions involved.

In his search for understanding, Asma starts with what he calls 'manly' monsters; those like Beowulf, Alexander and Ripley (of *Alien*) or the main characters of many a thriller, who, undaunted by the odds, press on to victory leaving death and destruction in their wake. Then follow sections on the monsters the ancient world enshrined in myths and tales; then the mediæval world, during which period the monstrous sports of the natural world mutate into the agents of greater evil, including the possessed and the witch-finder as well as their demons. In the next part, the dawn of science confronts us with freaks of taxidermy; monstrous births and medical museums; the idea that pregnant women should not look at hideous deformity; Frankenstein's pathetic creature; genetic chimeræ and the Darwinian view of the struggle to survive.

The penultimate section explores the dark landscape of inner turmoil; rage, aggression, desire and fear, 'cold' psychopathy, inhumanity, malignancy and 'human' evil. The tour ends with 'torturers, terrorists and zombies', and many-headed xenophobia; projected into future forms as mad scientists and 'inhuman' robots, aliens and mutants, bio-genetic scourges, disembodied minds, and unstoppable 'trojans' like the brooms in Disney's *Fantasia*.

Poole's book, at first glance, seems to cover the same fearful gamut, but actually focuses on the social impact of the burgeoning 'monster' imagery in the USA, through comics, books, films and TV, that is re-invented for kids' cartoons in an incestuous recycling.

What would we do "if someone held a gun to our head and told us to cut someone's throat?"

Poole is a historian who teaches courses on American monsterism, but when he praises his own children for telling their children "that monsters are for story time rather than for religious and political enemies", you know the analysis is not going to be deep.

That said, Poole certainly has a good grasp of his very rich and diverse subject. If you want a snapshot of the modern American entertainment media's obsession with monsters – from the era of Chaney and Karloff, through the fertile period of Cronenberg, Romero, Craven and Cameron, to the "hot and sexy" undead of *True Blood* and *Twilight* – then you won't get a much better one than this.

Asma, on the other hand, relentlessly pursues his incomprehension of the monster within each human, demonstrating repeatedly that the distinction between hero and monster is one of a point of view, not of substance. Why, in the midst of horror, he asks, can we be fascinated by it? "Whether Nazis, Pinochet lackeys, American soldiers at Abu Graib or Khmer teenagers at S21, the story is that they were just 'following orders'." He reminds us of Stanley Milgram's famous experiment on the psychology of obedience (in which average Americans were coaxed into administering what they assumed were painful – or even lethal – electric shocks) and asks what each of us would do "if someone held a gun to our head and told us to cut someone's throat". Would we become monsters as the teenagers at S21 did?

We would hope that most of us will never be in that situation, but through myths and legends etc. we might instinctively explore what we dare not openly recognise within ourselves. Poole, like the great myth-tellers of old, shows how the great heroes measured themselves at arms' length against the notoriety of their adversaries, although modern monsters (e.g., tyrants, terrorists and viruses) tend to target masses from a greater distance. But what makes Asma's study the more valuable is his insight into what might turn an otherwise ordinary person into a hero or monster.

Here we see it is but a short step from the revenge of the spurned Medea, or Lycaon and Hecuba of Troy driven mad by the death of her children to today's tragic stories of collective suicide, or of the deluded but fatal exorcism of an unloved child, or of a parent fearing the loss of a child in a divorce killing the whole family. And why Geiger's relentless, remorseless aliens are the antithesis of Frankenstein's 'Prometheus'; and why, instead of obeying the advice "Don't look!", we can't tear our eyes away even if we feel guilty for peering.

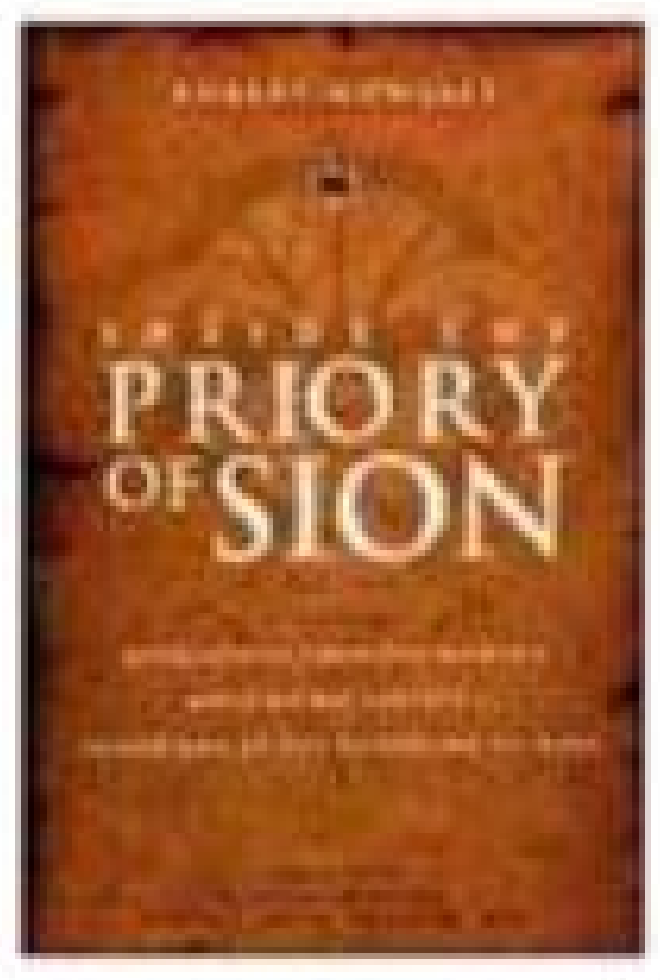
Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict

BOTH BOOKS ARE EXCELLENT IN THEIR VERY DIFFERENT WAYS **9**

Jesus and Mary chain

Unverifiable and dubious insider comments, some careless assumptions, a few basic errors – and then it gets a bit silly



Inside the Priory of Sion

Revelations from the World's Most Secret Society – Guardians of the Bloodline of Jesus

Robert Howells

Watkins Publishing 2011
Pb, 306pp, bib, ind, plates, £12.99, ISBN 9781780280172
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.69

Probably for the first time since the somewhat dubious Pierre Plantard spoke to Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, a member of the Priory of Sion has cooperated with the author of a book on the shadowy organisation.

Robert Howells's *Inside the Priory of Sion* draws on often gnomic and always unverifiable comments from Nicholas Haywood (familiar from the 2008 documentary *Bloodline*) and other un-named Priory of Sion insiders to set out the supposed history and aims of the group. But the outcome is hardly the "revelations" promised in the subtitle.

To be fair, Howells writes that "not everything [Haywood] says can be taken at face value. Very little can be verified or, in some cases, trusted." He also admits "the risk of Sion using us to fulfil an agenda… some act of propaganda in which we were unwitting pawns".

The safest response for the reader, then, is to distrust every statement in the book that emanates from the Priory of Sion. And that leaves little that is new.

On the plus side, it does gather together most of what is known or surmised about the history (real or imaginary) of the Priory of Sion; for that alone it is useful.

The author makes some very obvious and careless assumptions, including his easy acceptance of the Priory of Sion's supposedly long history. Sometimes, he says, a society creates or works through other groups or orders. "Sion has been known by a number of different names and worked through other organisations to meet its aims at various points in history." Or perhaps, as they offer no evidence for their claim, these were entirely different societies now co-opted into the spurious Priory of Sion history – but no. "The revelation that Sion did indeed use different names explains the difficulty in finding proof for its existence in antiquity."

Of course.

Howells commits a few basic errors, for example saying that Christ "promised to return after a further 2,000 years" (he didn't), and that three rather than two of the Gospels were based on an earlier source known as Q, thus misunderstanding the whole point of Q.

He wrongly attributes the well-known line "this myth of Jesus has served us well" to the 20th-century Pope Pius X rather than the 16th-century Pope Leo X – though in fact its source is a satirical piece by an English anti-Catholic writer 53 years after Leo's death.

He includes several oft-cited but spurious factoids, such as Jacques de Molay cursing the Pope and the French king as he burned at the stake.

Nic Haywood tells the author both "That Jesus married and had children, there is evidence beyond doubt" and "The legend of Our Lady [Mary Magdalene] taking refuge in France is fact. The order possess substantial evidence for this" – but he doesn't offer any evidence for either assertion.

Largely because of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, the Priory of Sion is inseparable from the Rennes-le-Château story, so a good chunk of the book is devoted to that, with a selection of the usual speculations – though Howells is alert to the danger of "attempt[ing] to fit all the pieces into a single theory". One idea seems new, though: "It is not inconceivable that the Priory of Sion killed Saunière", because he was either too arrogant or too greedy.

Howells casts doubt on Ben Hammott's film of a tomb in the area, as seen in *Bloodline*, and on the glass bottles and wooden chest which Hammott and others dug up, hinting heavily that these may have been "planted" by a member of the Priory of Sion "to reignite the Rennes-le-Château debate".

He is rightly critical of those who have removed objects they have found, saying that "items taken previously should be returned". But having criticised the amateur treasure-hunters he then argues (with little evidence) for a tomb or underground temple which may (or may not) contain the bodies of Mary Magdalene and/or Jesus and/or their children.

The book gets a bit silly at the end. The Priory of Sion warning, "The apocalypse will happen within your lifetime", turns out to be vague; it could be caused by anything – glaciation, volcano, comet.

This "great cull" of much of humanity is necessary "to bring about a widespread shift in consciousness" – and after the apocalypse the world will need "a uniting leader… it is here that the bloodline will find its purpose".

And it's all linked to the tomb or temple that is to be found near Rennes-le-Château…

David V Barrett

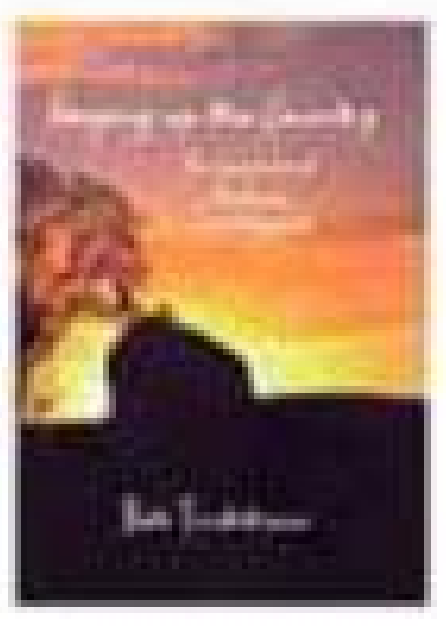
Fortean Times Verdict
THE PEOPLE WHO LIKE THIS SORT OF THING WILL LOVE IT **5**

Singing up the Country

The Songlines of Avebury and Beyond

Bob Trubshaw

Alternative Albion 2011
Pb, 189pp, illus, refs, ind, £14.95, ISBN 9781905646210
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.95



Thanks to Michael Dames's influential writings of the 1970s, many people regard it as fact that the 'sacred landscape' of Avebury symbolises belief in an Earth Mother goddess and veneration of the feminine principle. But Dames's theories are not proven – some Neolithic Europeans worshipped masculine 'sky-gods' who are never mentioned in connection with Avebury.

A huge mound like Silbury could just as likely have been raised to a god of the sky as a goddess of the Earth. Neolithic Britons were not all peace-loving proto-hippies either: some, at least, were smashing each other's skulls in with stone axes. Because Dames has inspired so much vapid New Age nonsense, I have grown suspicious of any new book that credits him as an influence. However Bob Trubshaw's *Singing up the Country*, although certainly Damesian, is in a class of its own: I found it a compelling read, with many convincing and stimulating ideas.

The title is a reference to *The Songlines*, Bruce Chatwin's pæan to the Aboriginal dreamtime myths of Australia. Trubshaw successfully transposes this idea to prehistoric Britain, considering how myths may have been used as an aid to navigating the landscape. As an accomplished folklorist, he is able to do this with authority, backing up his claims with detailed research; his interpretation of surviving Anglo-Saxon placenames is particularly good.

There is plenty of fascinating and original material. Recent archæological evidence from Silbury Hill indicates that turfs used to start the mound came from many different locations: it seems people may have been bringing pieces, literally, of their 'home turf' to add to the mound.

Trubshaw has traced a recent parallel – an early folklorist's account of tenant farmers meeting with their landlord at the 'Moody Bush Stone' (its name perhaps derived from 'moot') in 18th-century Leicestershire. Each brought a piece of turf from his own land, which had to be placed on the stone before the meeting could commence.

Several aspects of Avebury's landscape are considered, such as acoustics and the all-important springs and rivers. Some of Michael Dames's original themes are re-examined in greater depth, including the provenance of the name 'Kennet' which, it seems, probably does originate from 'cunt'. Trubshaw writes with a practised and confident ease. His entertaining and sometimes jocular style makes for very easy reading; the experience is rather like sitting in a comfy pub with a pint, listening to a seasoned storyteller. Somewhat unexpectedly, *Singing up Country* ends with a fictional and visionary narrative about a young Neolithic girl and her grandmother travelling by boat along the River Kennet from the Thames, to attend a ceremony at Avebury. I thoroughly expected to hate this, but to my surprise, not only did I enjoy it – it was really quite moving.

Steve Marshall

Fortean Times Verdict

SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE ENGLISH SONGLINES **8**

The Edge of Physics

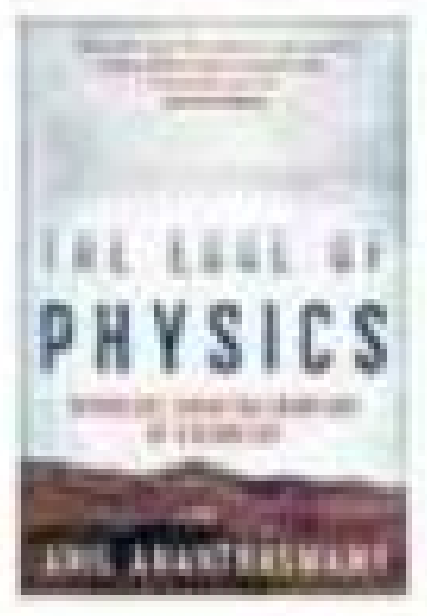
Dispatches from the Frontiers of Cosmology

Anil Ananthaswamy

Duckworth Overlook 2011

Pb, 336pp, notes, bib, ind, £9.99, ISBN 9780715640722

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49



What's the difference between real science and pseudoscience? It's not a trick question, and you probably know the answer. They both come up with theories that explain the facts, but real science makes predictions that can be tested by experiment. In the case of cosmology and fundamental physics, where the subject matter is so far removed from everyday life, the design of suitable experiments requires immense ingenuity and often pushes human capabilities to their limits.

In this truly outstanding book, Anil Ananthaswamy describes 10 experiments on the cutting edge of modern physics. He doesn't do this simply by sitting in his office, researching them on his computer – he travels around the world, visiting facilities and talking to scientists working in some of the most extreme environments on the planet. His journey takes him to mountain-top observatories in Chile, Hawaii and the Himalayas, neutrino telescopes in Siberia and Antarctica, a dark-matter detector half a mile below Minnesota, and the tunnels of the Large Hadron Collider near Geneva.

This is a book about remarkable people working in remarkable places. In passing, it's inevitable that you will learn something about cosmic inflation, dark energy, supersymmetry and the Higgs Boson, but the book never gets bogged down in scientific minutiæ that most readers won't be interested in. What's more, Ananthaswamy never lets you forget that the science sits at the tip of a giant iceberg, resting on a solid foundation of – often extreme – engineering. Constructing a state-of-the-art observatory on the top of a mountain, or at the bottom of a disused iron mine, or at the South Pole, is no mean achievement. The engineers are the heroes of this book just as much as the scientists.

Many popular accounts of cosmology do science a disservice, by conveying the impression that it's a collection of concepts and theories that the reader can choose to believe or disbelieve as if they were religious dogma. The difference, as this book makes clear, is the continuous effort to validate or falsify the theories through experimental endeavours.

By focusing on science as a process rather than a collection of ideas, Anil Ananthaswamy has succeeded in writing a popular account that genuinely captures what science is all about.

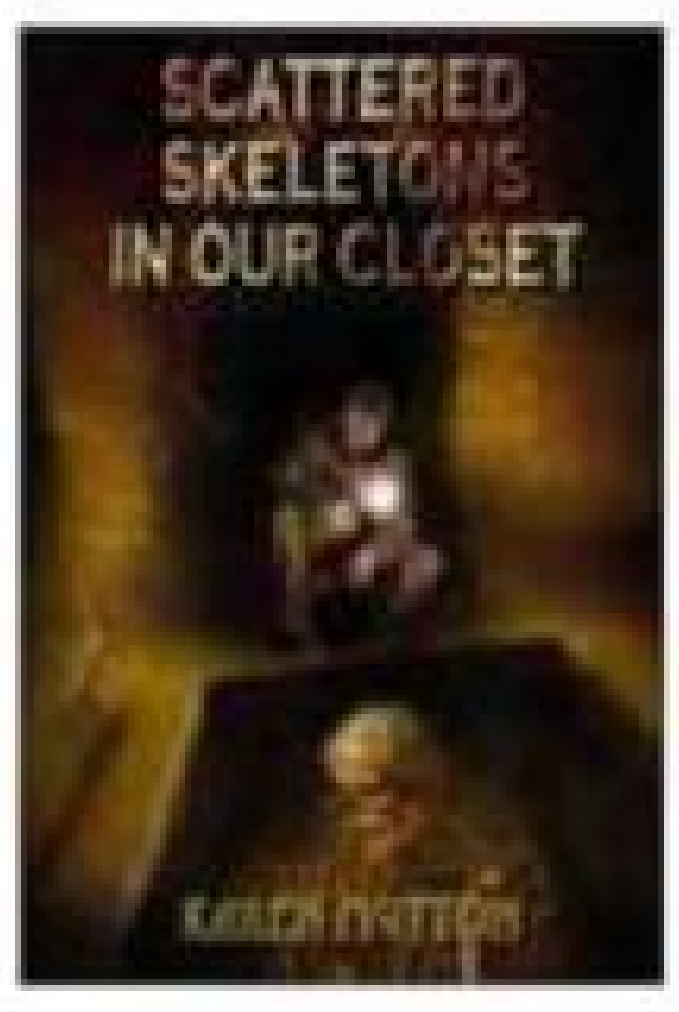
Andrew May

Fortean Times Verdict

FAR-OUT SCIENCE IN PRETTY FAR-OUT LOCATIONS **10**

Bare bones

A good idea marred by dodgy editing, worse design and a lack of discernment



Scattered Skeletons in Our Closet

Karen Mutton

Adventures Unlimited Press 2011

Pb, 229pp, illus, refs, gloss, $18.95/£15.99, ISBN 9781935487418

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49

The cover blurb says this book is "irrefutable evidence of humankind's strange past", a phrase whose subtlety refutes my powers of interpretation. What this book is, or tries to be, is a comprehensive overview of theories and evidence of humanity's past as understood through studying skeletal remains. That's a laudable aim, and Karen Mutton has a decent go at it; but the book is ultimately a failure.

Mutton surveys the orthodox literature reasonably well, highlighting the main lines of theory, and rehearsing the physical evidence – such as it is; the skeletal sum of our palæo-archæological efforts to date would hardly trouble a couple of large suitcases. She then turns her attention to anomalous evidence, and to some extent, alternative theories of human origins, and of the makeup of the past population of the planet. These get a good hearing too: so what am I complaining about?

Well, for a start, it seems the author has treated the orthodox camp with considerably more critical acumen than she has employed in reading the alternative literature. She manages, for good portions of the book, to sound by turns cynical and credulous. I also got the strong impression that, although she is clearly biased towards alternative models, she knows less about them than about the establishment stuff.

There is no clear overview in *Scattered Skeletons*, and really no clear vision at all. The book is an untidy compendium of other people's discoveries and ideas, which fails to lead us to any kind of conclusion. Mutton is nowhere near discerning enough in her selection of anomalous evidence; too much of it is the usual sensational stuff from the kind of popular books that pander to gosh-wow culture.

The book itself suffers from a serious lack of editing, and a terrible layout. Bits of text are stuck together with no regard for consecutive sense, and there are howlers all over the place. Headings and titles are inconsistent, and the references, such as they are, regularly intrude into the main text, so the irritated reader ends up reading an oblique newspaper headline as if it were the concluding sentence of the paragraph. This, along with the lack of annotations, notes or index, leaves the book giving every impression of being put together over a weekend. A good idea, badly messed up.

Noel Rooney

Fortean Times Verdict

COULD – AND SHOULD – HAVE BEEN A LOT BETTER **5**

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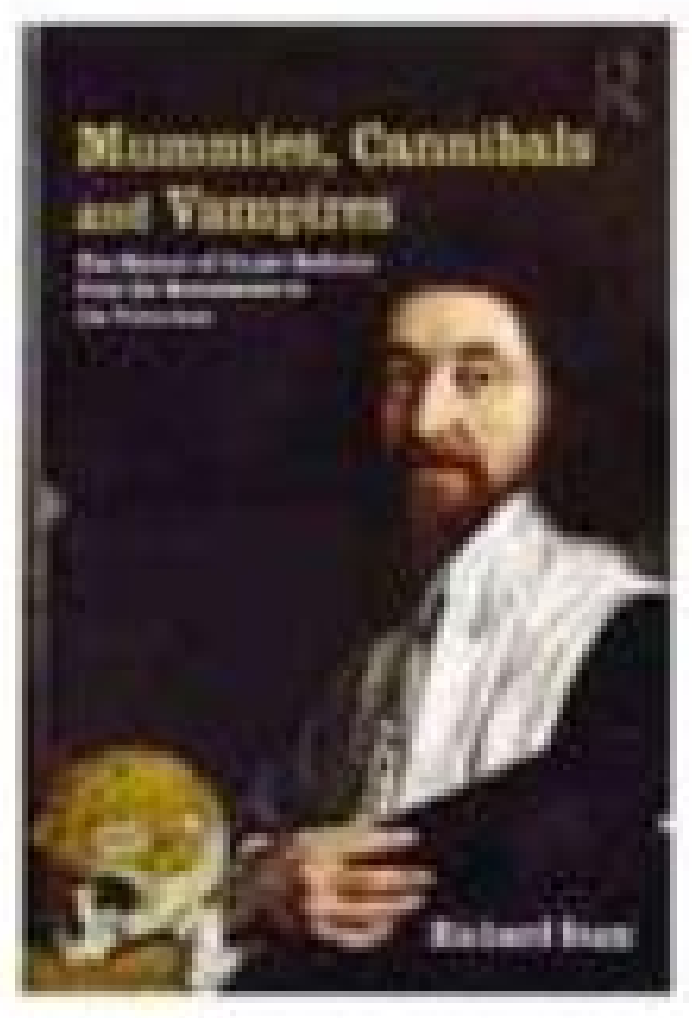
Yummy mummies...

Blood, excrement and cadaveric flesh were the aspirin (and the Oil of Olay) of their day, and were often as effective



Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires

The History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians

Richard Sugg

Routledge 2011
Pb, 374pp, ind, refs, £24.99, ISBN 9780415674171
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £23.74

Medicine's come a long way since physicians managed epilepsy using "testicles of bear, pulverised camel's brains [and] maggots from a rotting sheep's nose". Patients with cataracts no longer endure ophthalmologists blowing ash of burnt snail or dried, powdered human excrement into their eyes. Women's cosmetics moved beyond smearing the "shit of athletic youths" and the "discharge of just born infants" on their faces. Until surprisingly recently blood, excrement and cadaveric flesh was as accepted a part of the medical armamentarium as aspirin, Prozac and Zocor are today.

In this important new book, Sugg traces physicians' changing attitudes towards corpse medicine and medical cannibalism. He focuses on the medical hegemony, as physicians, surgeons and pharmacists developed the professions we recognise today.

Corpse medicine and medical cannibalism often worked. Sugg notes that in 1547 a shard of metal flew into the eye of Benvenuto Cellini. A surgeon dripped the blood of two live pigeons into the sculptor's eye. Within two days, the chip loosened and was removed. Urea (in fæces and urine) is a well-established skin care product and is still included in some products. In other cases, the placebo response – essentially, if you think you're getting an active treatment, you'll feel better – accounted for much of the benefit. (The placebo response makes an important contribution to the effectiveness of modern medicines.) As Sugg points out, many treatments were expensive. Even today, the placebo response is stronger if the doctor claims the inactive treatment is dearer. The emotional element involved in the use of a corpse or medical cannibalism probably further enhanced the placebo effect.

As Sugg notes, medical vampirism proved remarkably persistent. In 1492, physicians to the dying Pope Innocent VIII bled three youths to death so he could drink "their blood, still fresh and hot". In 1651, the physician to London's Savoy Hospital published *The Art of Distillation*, offering formulations of oil, water and a quintessence of blood. Indeed, medical vampirism attracted considerable empirical support from some leading intellectuals. Robert Boyle believed in blood's medical powers because of "what he considers rigorously persuasive evidence, derived from both his own experiments, and reliable associates". Boyle was the Royal Society's "leading intellect", who Newton addressed with "uncharacteristic humility". (Anæmia can cause debilitating symptoms including breathlessness, fatigue, headache, palpitations and severe chest pain. This, I believe, contributes to the myth: drinking blood could replenish iron stores and so alleviate anaemia.)

Sugg's focus from the Renaissance to the Victorians means he doesn't really examine modern corpse medicine, although he touches on the trade in stolen human organs. However, until the advent of genetically engineered versions in the 1980s, physicians routinely extracted growth hormone from cadaveric pituitary glands and follicle stimulating hormone – used in infertility treatment – from human urine. Nevertheless, Sugg's book is essential for establishing the historical context for the vexed ethical dilemmas surrounding increasing the supply of organs for transplant.

Indeed, the book's strength lies in Sugg's exploration of the historical and intellectual background behind the changing attitudes towards corpse medicine. In addition to being intellectually rigorous, Sugg's book is great fun and he often writes with scatological glee. Indeed, he notes that "much of this book is what might be called Dirty History". To take one example, he recounts that the Duchess of Orléans complained in 1694 that the facilities in the house she was staying meant she needed to "hold on to my turd until evening" and had to endure the "displeasure of having to shit outside, which gravely perturbs me because I like to shit at ease with my ass fully bared".

You get the feeling the medical establishment would rather sweep corpse medicine and medical cannibalism under the surgery carpet. Few doctors seem to have the same 'affection' for corpse medicine as many chemists do for alchemy or pharmacists for exotic herbal remedies. *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires* is an important and overdue examination of this neglected aspect of medical history. Sugg says that "for some, the most potent core of the present book [is] a very basic revision of the history of one our deepest taboos" – and he succeeds admirably.

Mark Greener

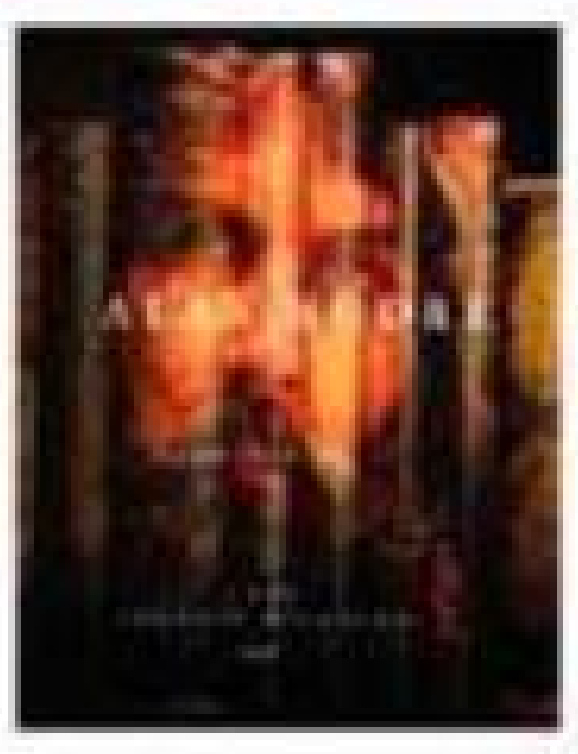
Fortean Times Verdict
OVERDUE LOOK AT A NEGLECTED PART OF MEDICAL HISTORY **10**

Alan Moore

Storyteller

Gary Spencer Millidge

ILEX 2011
Hb, 320pp, illus, £25.00, ISBN 9781907579127
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £21.25



Recent years have seen several books about Alan Moore's work, so latecomers to this niche need to seriously cut it. Gary Spencer Millidge writes a straight biographical account of Moore's life and career, with input from the man and his collaborators. Full-page reproductions of paintings and strips from all phases of the Moore canon are a treat. The rare material many aficionados are baying for includes illustrations, paintings and scripts by Moore, as well as concept sketches by artists and generous excerpts from obscure one-off strips. Even the mythic wallplan for *Big Numbers*, best-known of the unfinished projects, appears over two spreads.

The book covers the gestation of the ideas; the battles with publishers; the formative influences and early work of the acid-dealing schoolboy; the zine covers and gig posters; and the dementedly-stippled strips and gags for *Sounds* magazine.

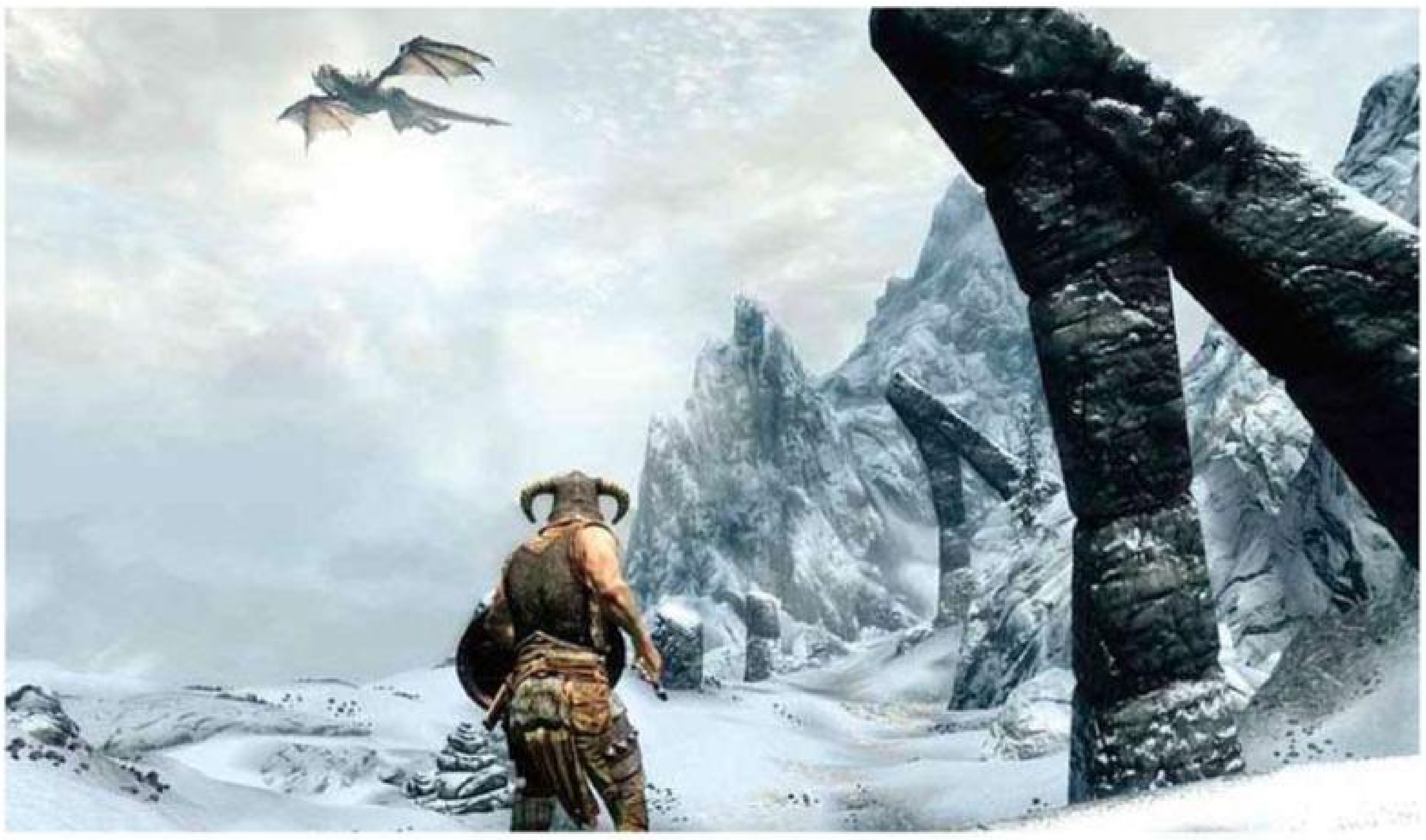
Millidge steers away from criticism (Moore is cringeworthy as well as brilliant, derivative as well as protean), but the format allows Moore's radicalism and creative daring to be weighed against his indulgences, such as the tendency of the later works towards meta-fiction.

It's inevitably a whistle-stop tour of much that will be familiar, but the handsome presentation and the fresh material from all Moore's artistic periods, plus a 19-track CD of Moore's musical and spoken word forays, rounds up much material that was rare or obtainable only at ridiculous prices.

This is the best tribute any Alan Moore admirer could ever hope for. Thanks for your toils, Mr Millidge.

Jerry Glover

Fortean Times Verdict
A REAL TREAT FOR MOORE AFICIONADOS EVERYWHERE **9**



The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Xbox 360, PS3 £49.99, PC £39.99, Bethesda Softworks

36 hours in, and I find myself atop a snow-covered peak in the far north of Skyrim, perched on my proud steed (best 1,000 gold pieces I've ever spent) and looking out on a gorgeous vista of woods, lakes and mountains. I'm slightly lost, the weather has come down, with a nasty blizzard starting to blow, and there are a couple of deadly sabre-cats prowling around down below the treeline.

Problem is, as well as my horse – to whom I've grown quite attached after our numerous adventures – I've also ended up with a dog called Meeko in tow. I found him out in the wilderness, sitting by his dead master's bed in a little hut in the middle of nowhere. He attached himself to me, and I've become rather attached to him. He's a splendid fellow, but a bit too gung-ho for his own good. I know he'd go for the sabre-cats as if they were a pair of mud crabs; but with their great teeth and vicious claws they'd make short work of poor Meeko. The best bet, it strikes me, is to gather up my little menagerie (I just can't help but feel responsible for their welfare), attempt to find a trail down the other side of the mountain and head, temporarily at least, for home.

After all, back in the bustling city of Whiterun I've managed to buy a cosy little house called Breezehome, converting my dungeon spoils into home comforts; with the help of Tamriel's equivalent of the Ikea catalogue, I've kitted it out quite nicely, too – big kitchen with a roaring firepit to cook on (venison stew is my speciality); bookcases for the various arcane tomes I've picked up on my travels; my own alchemy laboratory for experimenting with the flowers, fungi and other substances I've harvested, combining raw ingredients to make (when my weird mixtures actually work) potions, poisons and restorative tonics. I can leave the horse at the nearby stables, park Meeko in front of the fire and sit down and rethink my strategy for retrieving the Horn of Jurgen Windcaller and returning it to those mysterious greybeards in their temple on High Hrothgar. Perhaps I'll take a stroll around the city ramparts and just watch the eerie beauty of the Northern Lights. After all, a break from adventuring is as good as a rest.

As you've probably gathered, *Skyrim* has taken over my life for the past few evenings – so let this review be a warning to you. Yes, it's crammed with every fantasy cliché you could think of, and then some, but it's so beautifully realised, richly and wittily detailed and compulsively playable that you'd have to be quite a curmudgeon to care about that.

As always seems to be the case in such fantasy tales, you start out as a complete nobody, caught up in a rebellion and heading for the executioner's block, only to find that you're actually a very special person indeed – the Dragonborn hero foretold in the ancient prophecies. You're not quite sure what this means or actually involves, but it sounds quite good and means that you can learn special magical shouts a bit like the ones dragons use (to talk to one another, I suppose).

Dragons are much to the fore in this latest Elder Scrolls incarnation. Amidst political turmoil that threatens to turn into all-out civil war (should I side with the Imperial forces or the nationalistic Stormcloak rebels?), these fearsome, wonderful beasts of distant legend have returned to Tamriel to wreak their own havoc for reasons that – 36 hours in – remain mysterious. As well as bearing on the main story arc, these impressive beasties also make randomly generated appearances, which leads to some truly unexpected and tremendously exciting encounters.

All will become clear, I've no doubt, given time – which is something you'll need plenty of to tackle this truly epic creation. Anyone who has played one of the previous *Elder Scrolls* titles will know that developers Bethesda don't skimp on content. *Skyrim* is a massive, open-world game that you can explore at your leisure – and if the claim that it contains some 150 explorable dungeons is true, then there's as much of it below ground as above.

It's probably possible to focus on the main quest and power through it, but where would the fun be in that? If, like me, you're an inveterate poker into nooks and crannies who always wants to have a look round the next corner or at the other side of the hill, then you simply have no chance of playing *Skyrim* quickly. There are compelling, multipart side-quests galore, and the nature of the lush and populous gameworld means that you're just as likely to spend time hunting, reading or pottering in your lab as actually adventuring with any particular aim in mind. Your character – there's a good choice of races to start with – is also constantly developing skills, basically through using them – the more you employ certain weapons, the more proficient you'll become with them; or you can focus on your magical abilities, even training with some highly accomplished mages. You'll need all the skills you can muster: there's a wonderful variety of foes out there to deal with, from bears and bandits to undead horrors and evil necromancers.

Skyrim has its little faults – the interface for keeping track of your weapons, potions and powers is a bit of a handful, to be honest. And PS3 users have reported such massive problems with savegames that it probably can't be recommended on that platform until this is fixed.

However, as I am an old-school PC gamer, this strikes me as a true masterpiece, as satisfying and unputdownable as a big, fat novel. Your other half will probably not be pleased, but you owe it to yourself to step through the wardrobe and into this magical land of myths and monsters; and if, at any point, you should remember our own world of credit crunches and Eurozone crises, you could be forgiven for never coming back at all…

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

UNDENIABLY BETTER THAN REAL LIFE; QUIT YOUR JOB NOW **10**

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS AND GAMES TO:
THE EDITOR, **FORTEAN TIMES**, DENNIS CONSUMER DIVISION,
30 CLEVELAND STREET, LONDON W1T 4JD, UK.

The Thing

Dir Matthijs van Heijningen Jr., US 2011
On UK release from 2 December

It's hard to overstate the impact of John Carpenter's 1982 movie *The Thing*, with its evocative and creepy Antarctic setting, its disturbingly minimal Morricone score, its slow-burning ramping up of paranoia and claustrophobia and, of course, its envelope-busting special effects that did things to dogs and humans one had never thought possible.

Impossible, too, to recapture the kind of excitement the film generated among its original audiences. Hollywood seems perpetually desperate to pull off such a feat in its frenzy of remaking, rebooting and recycling, but the end results rarely recapture the spirit of the originals so much as simply reshuffle their DNA into some awful, shambling parody of a proper movie, an ersatz abomination far easier to spot than the horrifying shape-shifter of Carpenter's classic film.

The makers of this latest 're-imagining' know full well the huge affection in which *The Thing* is held, and have tried (JJ Abrams-like) to dodge the ire of geeks by 'respecting' Carpenter's film and opting for a prequel rather than a remake.

Sounds like a smart move, until you realise some of the problems you've just set yourself. As any fule kno, it was the Norwegians who got to the alien spaceship first and unleashed its long-slumbering inhabitant (just like they got to the South Pole first, so it jolly well serves them right). So, problem number one is that anyone who has seen Carpenter's *The Thing* knows exactly what is going to happen, just not precisely how (this qualifies as fanboy fun, though, as we oldsters can enjoy seeing just how cleverly the prequel sets up the film we know and love and catalogue each continuity hit or miss with obsessive glee).

The second problem, of course, is that you've just saddled yourselves with a film in which all the characters are Norwegian; this might play well in certain parts of Minnesota but is a headache, really, as no one else cares about Norwegians very much. This one is quickly solved by our clever film-makers, using that tried-and-tested Hollywood solution: parachute in some proper Americans to sort everything out. Easy.

Except it isn't, and, as a result, the film goes off the boil within five minutes. Part of the genius of Carpenter's original is its utter commitment to the dramatic unities: the action unfolds over a short space of time in one setting and has no distracting subplots. Its icy, paranoid grip is not for one moment relaxed. Its world, for the duration of the film, is *the* world, and we are as trapped in it as the rapidly diminishing cast of characters.

This time around, after a sort of scene-setting prologue in which some Norwegians (speaking pesky Norwegian, necessitating subtitles) run into big trouble in their little tractor, we are whisked off to nice, normal America where an implausibly young and pretty girl palæontologist (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) is implausibly offered the chance to be in on the find of the century by a mysterious Norwegian and his equally implausibly good-looking American research assistant, who looks like he's stepped out of a knitwear catalogue (useful, really, as we know where he's going). Thus, the spell is broken; the mere glimpse of a busy outside world, easily and quickly reached by plane, is enough to ensure that when we do return to the icy Antarctic wastes, along with a helicopter full of Yanks, we do so as tourists, not residents.

From this point on, the film does exactly what you'd expect, returning to the Hawks/Nyby *The Thing from Another World* for the saucer discovery and thawing out and escape of the alien horror, then essentially following the outlines of the Carpenter version (I mean, what do you think is going to happen once the creature is loose?), right down to a retread of the blood-test scene (although this time involving checking for dental fillings instead).

There are some enjoyable effects; the blend of old school prosthetics and CGI mostly works. But, 30 years on, there's no way these sequences can achieve the mind-boggling, "You've got to be fucking kidding me!" impact of the original.

There are also, in place of Carpenter's quickly and effectively sketched character types, just too many damned people in this film. Far from being lonesome and a long way from home, this research station is packed to the gills – mostly, of course, with cheerful (well, not for long) Norwegians – hulking men with beards and woolly hats who are, frankly, indistinguishable from one another; so why should we care what happens to them? Or to the intrusive but equally dull Americans? Winstead's can-do, ass-kicking scientist ticks all the final girl boxes well enough, but adds no insights to the template; she's no substitute for Kurt Russell either.

And, finally, the much-vaunted desire to link this new *Thing* with the old one (yes, it ends with a dog being chased by a helicopter) also fails by simply not bothering to fill in a few important details, thus satisfying no one. Carpenter's film was a clever, stripped down and terrifying updating of a loveable, yet talky, 1951 classic; it brought new ideas and new scares to the table. The 2011 *Thing* has neither ideas nor scares to offer us. That's not to say it's all bad – just empty-headed, tension-free, formulaic and pointless; and it's really just a remake without the balls to admit it.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
THE THING IS, THIS THING JUST ISN'T TERRIBLY GOOD **4**

Brazil

Dir Terry Gilliam, UK 1985
20th Century Fox Home Entertainment , £15.99

Terry Gilliam's blackly comic riff on Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was always a hell of a lot better than Michael Radford's straight adaptation of the previous year, and remains, to my mind, one of the greatest British films ever made.

I remember being quite overwhelmed on its release by the film's non-stop, two-and-a-half-hour barrage of images and ideas – its rich mix of Pythonesque humour and Kafkaesque despair, dystopian satire and retro-futuristic design, noirish stylings and surreal narrative jolts was impossible to digest at a sitting. I had to see it again, the following week.

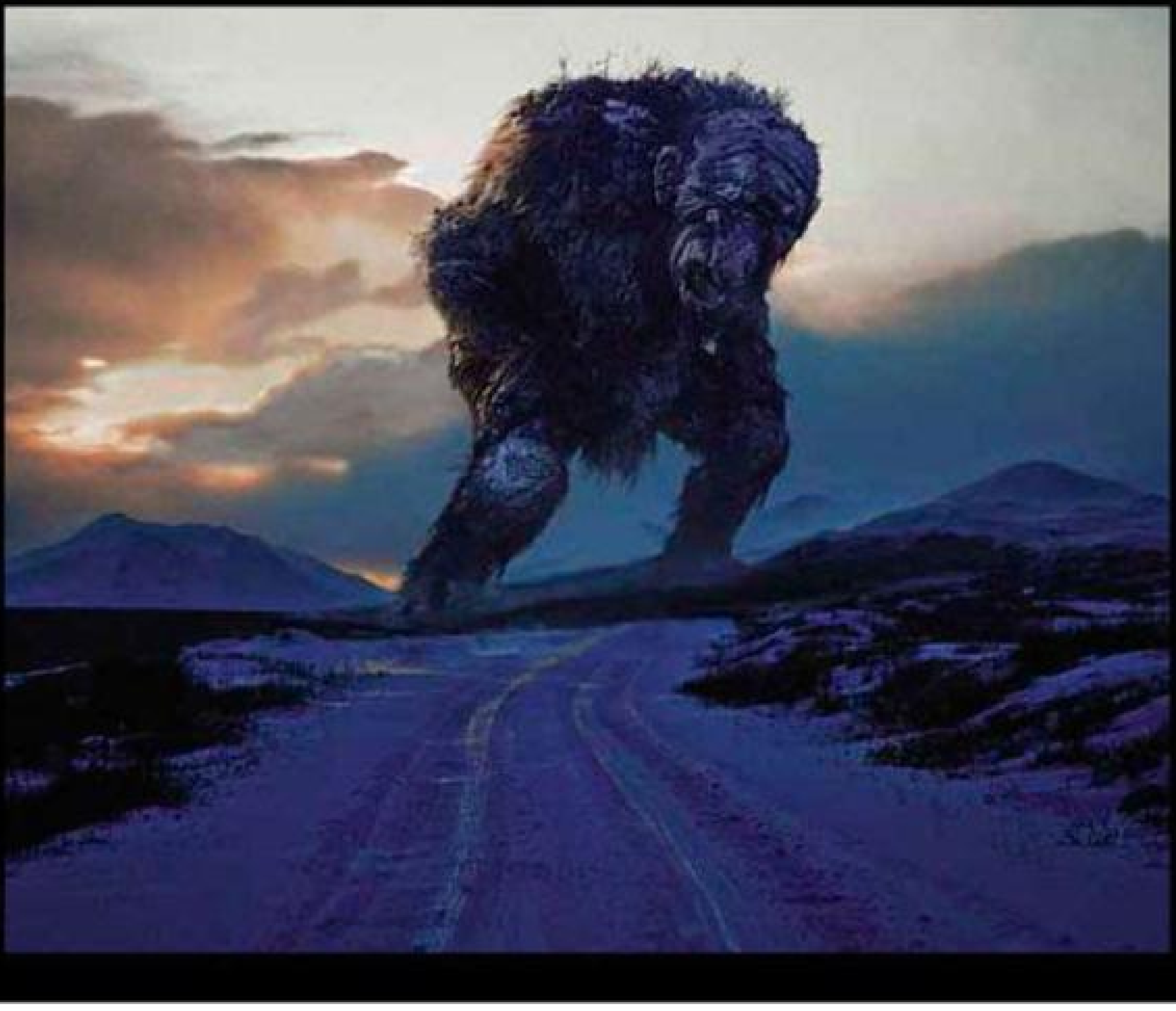
If ever a film benefited from a Blu-ray release, then, it's the visually overloaded *Brazil*; now, one can savour every over-composed wide-angle shot, spot every reference to Lang and Eisenstein, catch the cameos by scriptwriter Charles McKeown (who also played multiple characters in *Life of Brian*), Nigel Planer and Gilliam himself, and linger on the delightful central performances, particularly those of Jonathan Pryce, Robert De Niro and the unforgettably funny Ian Holm.

Gilliam's masterpiece was part of a renaissance of British film-making in the 1980s, one in which the national psyche seemed to access its repressed fantastic tradition in all kinds of new ways in films by directors as diverse as Derek Jarman, Neil Jordan and Peter Greenaway. It remains, though, a unique achievement, visually, conceptually and emotionally, for which the adjective 'Gilliamesque' really deserved to be coined. Perhaps he's never done anything as good since – although his recent staging of Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust* for English National Opera gave the lie to that thought and brought me full circle: its eye-popping visual and conceptual overload meant that, once again, I had to go for a second viewing. Perhaps, in opera, Terry has found a new Imaginarium in which to unleash his flood of ideas.

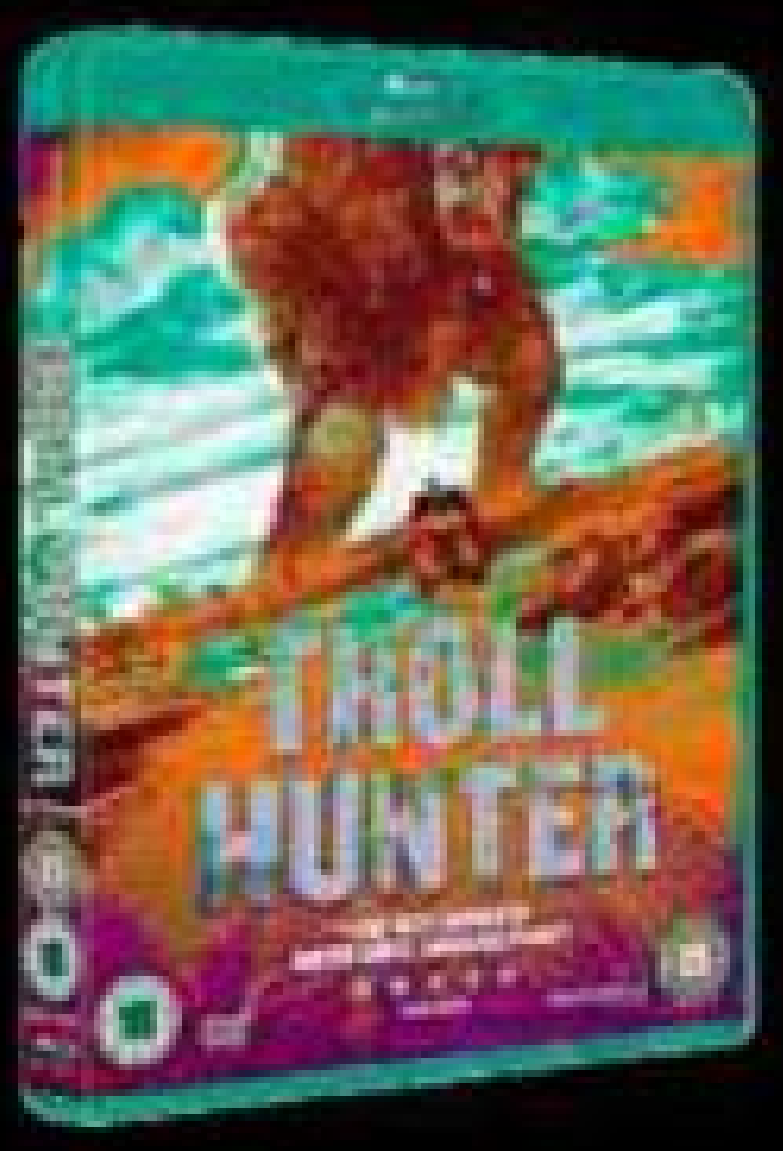
David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
MAKES MOST OTHER MOVIES LOOK QUITE THREADBARE **10**

COMPETITIONS



WIN! *TROLL HUNTER*



The critically acclaimed Norwegian hit TROLL HUNTER (cert. 15) will be released on DVD (£17.99) and Blu-ray (£19.99) on 9 January 2012.

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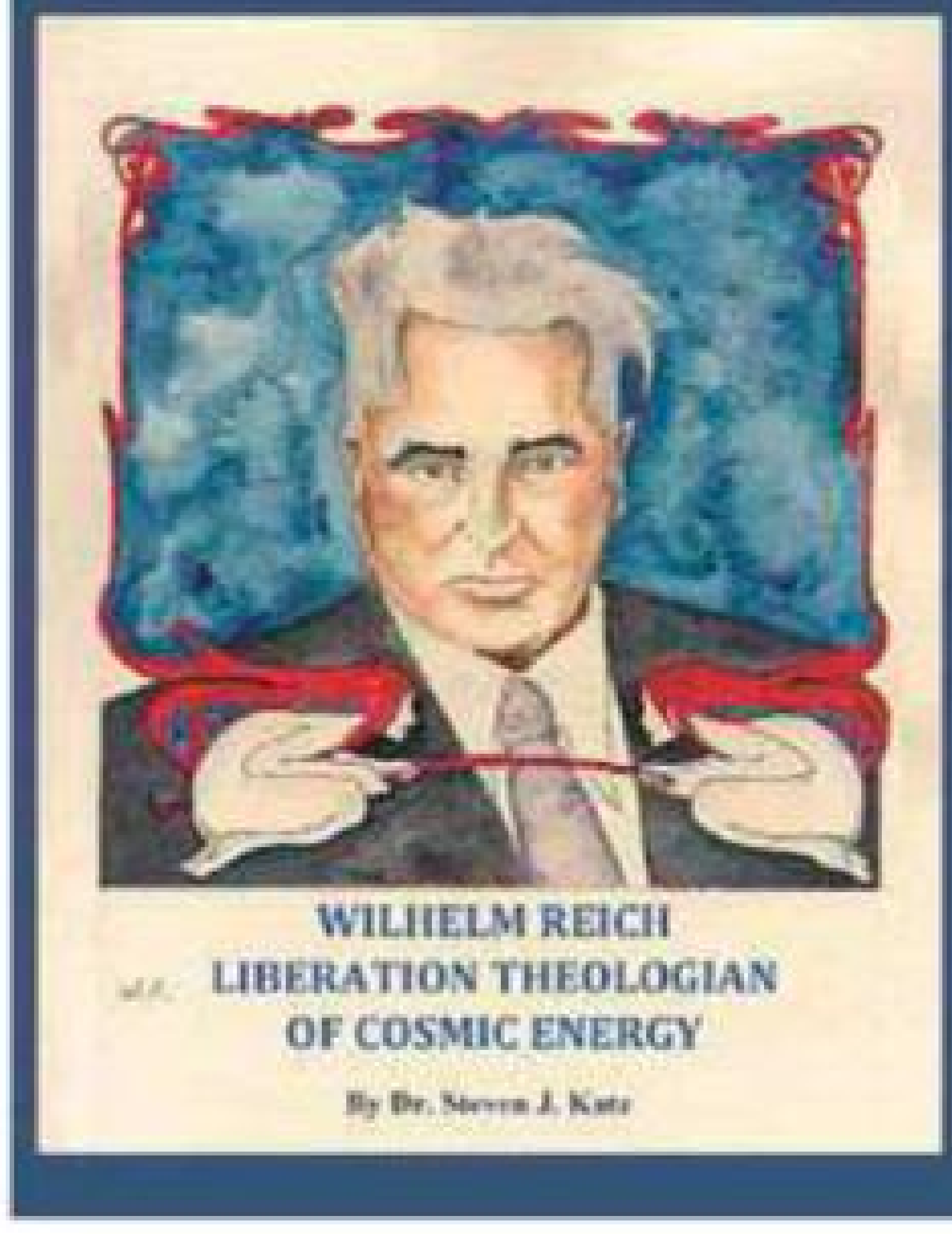
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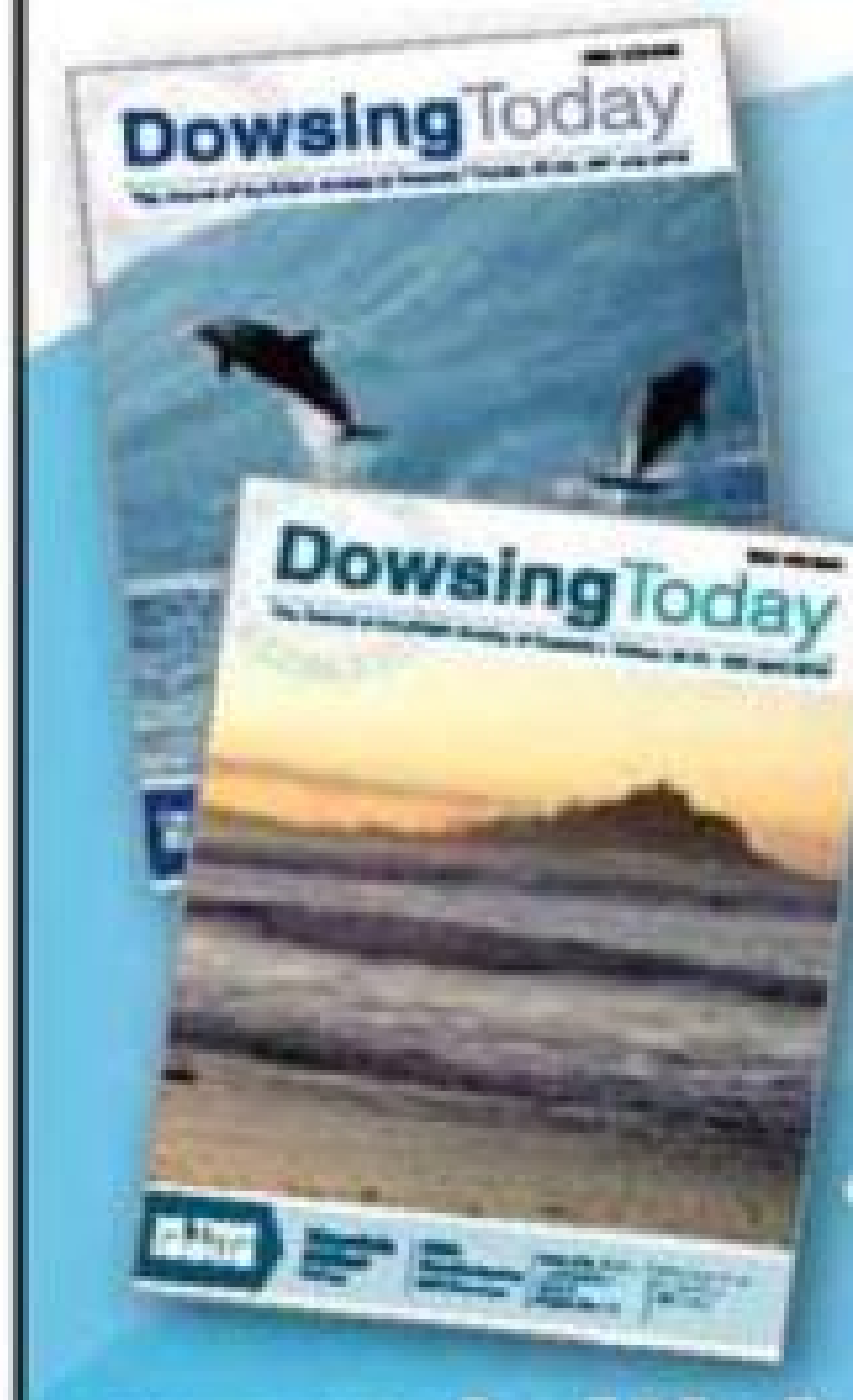
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The Man who was Never Shakespeare

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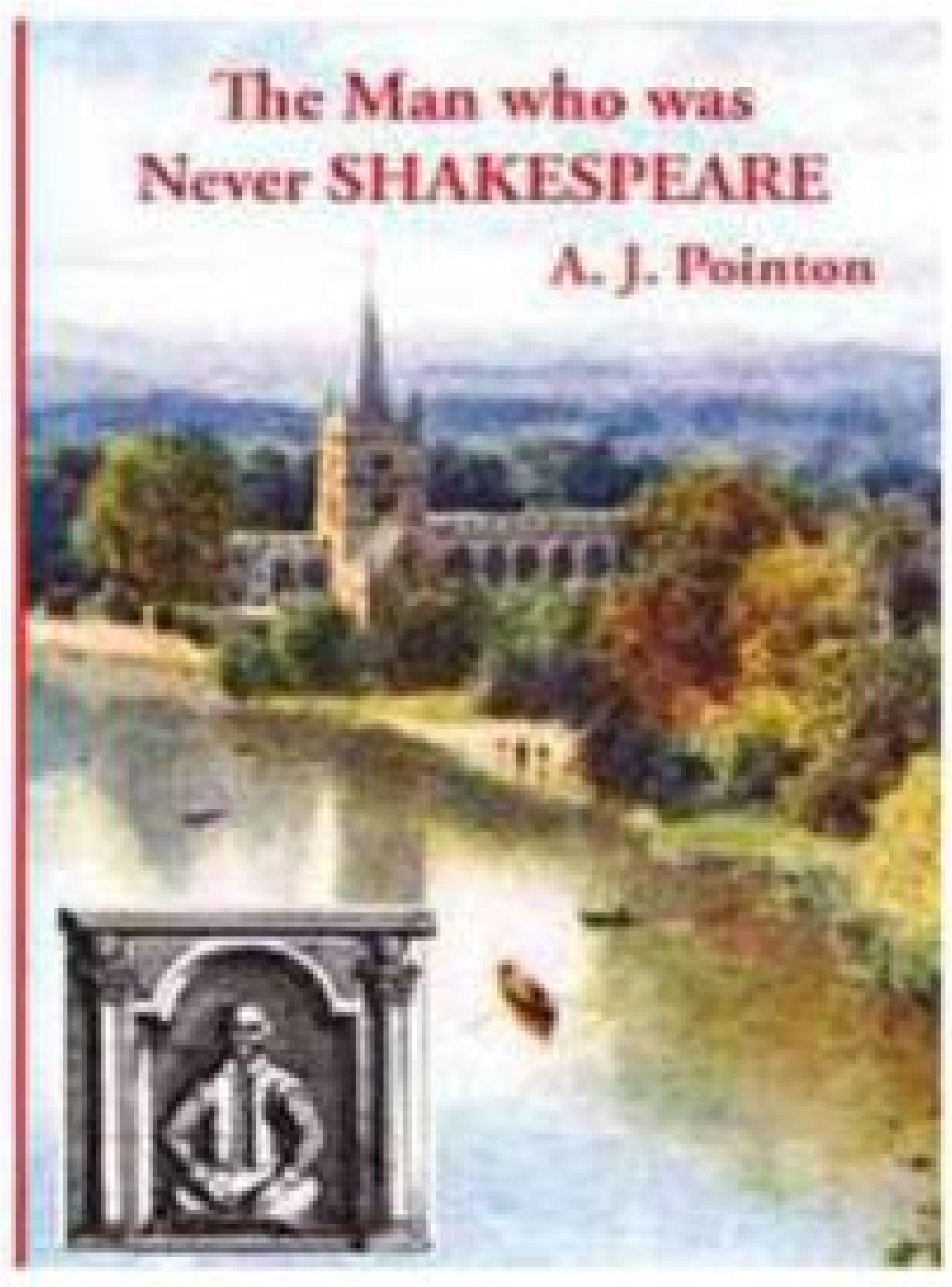
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Nexus Magazine review, Aug/Sept 2007

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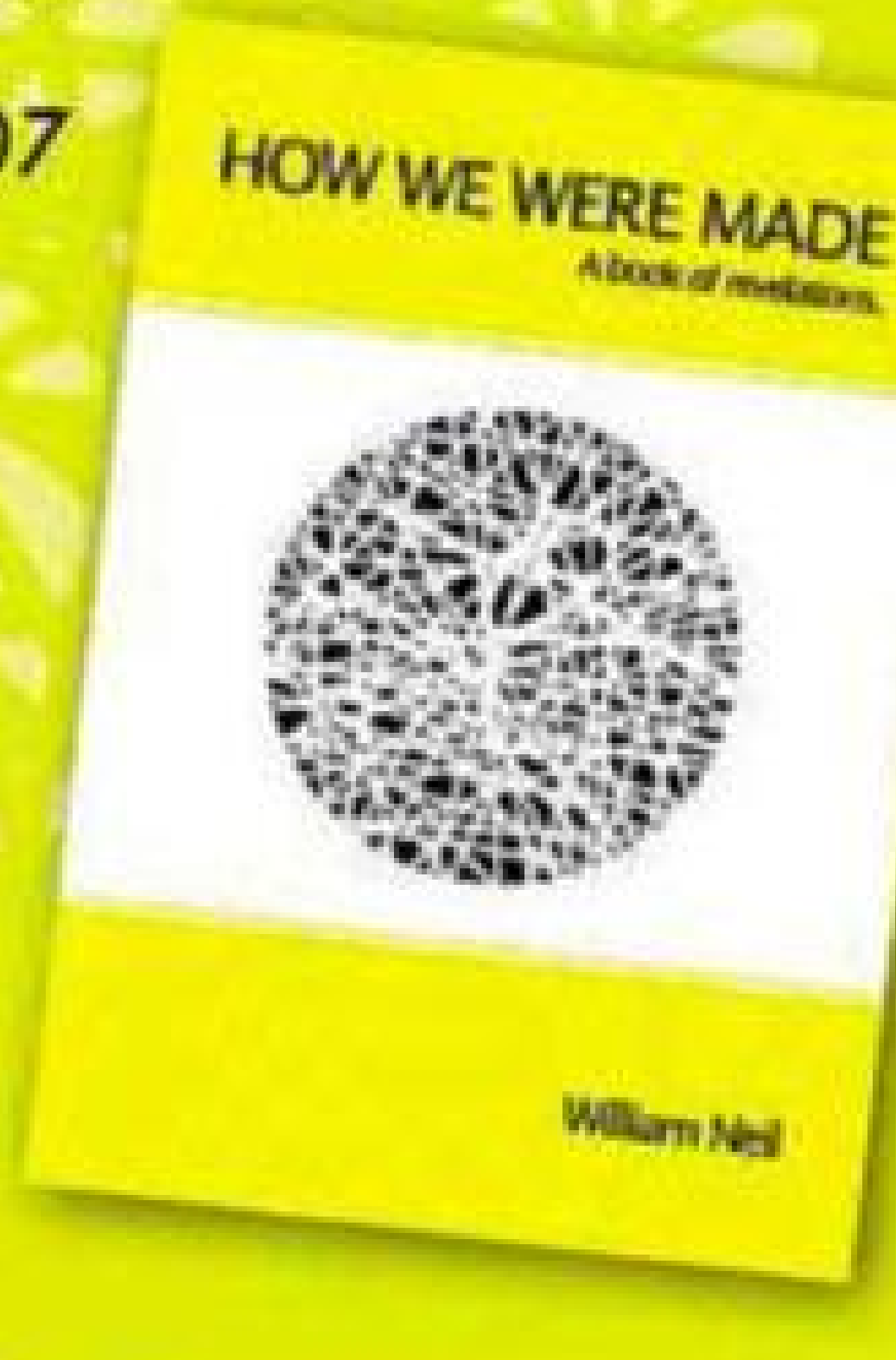
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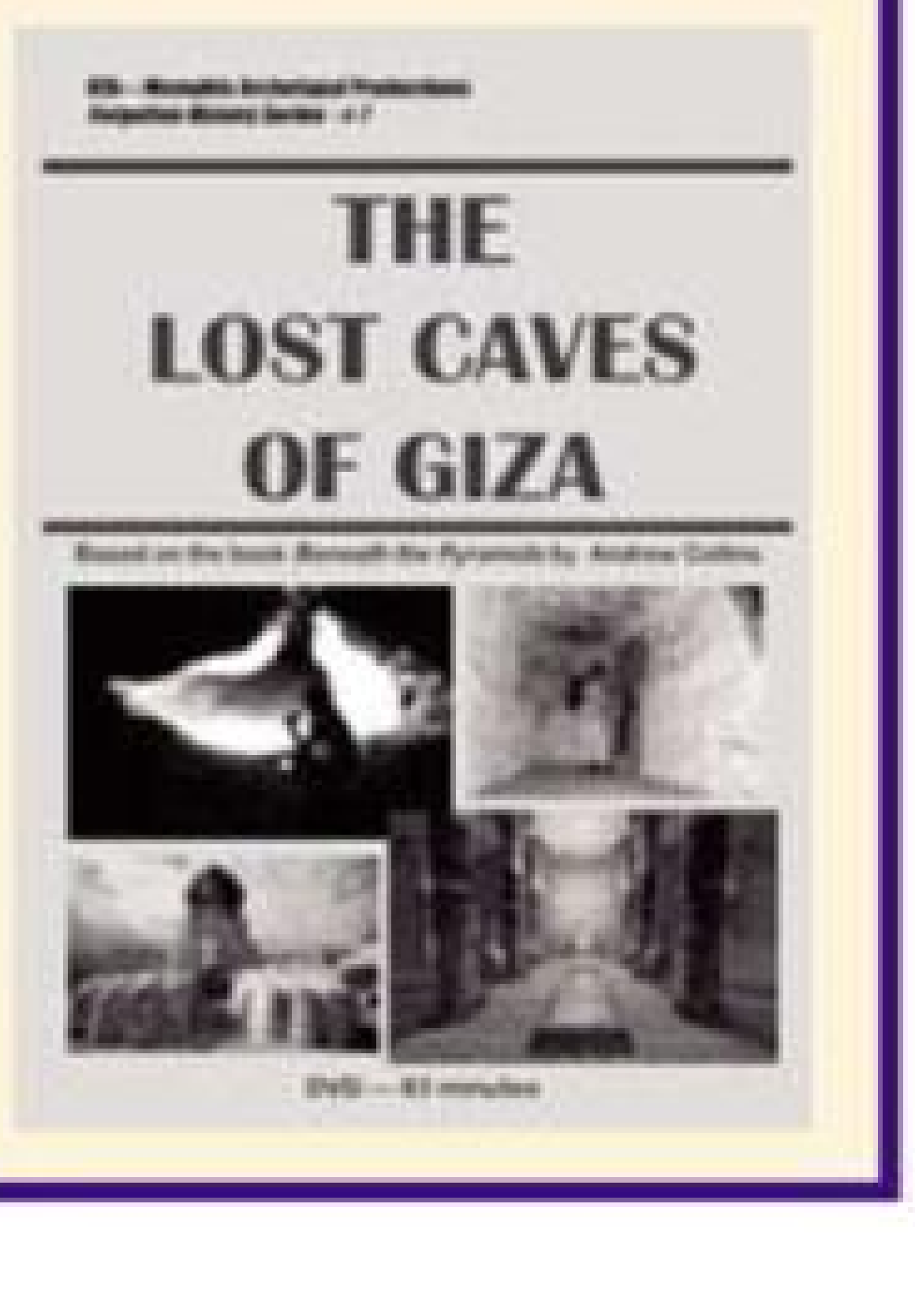
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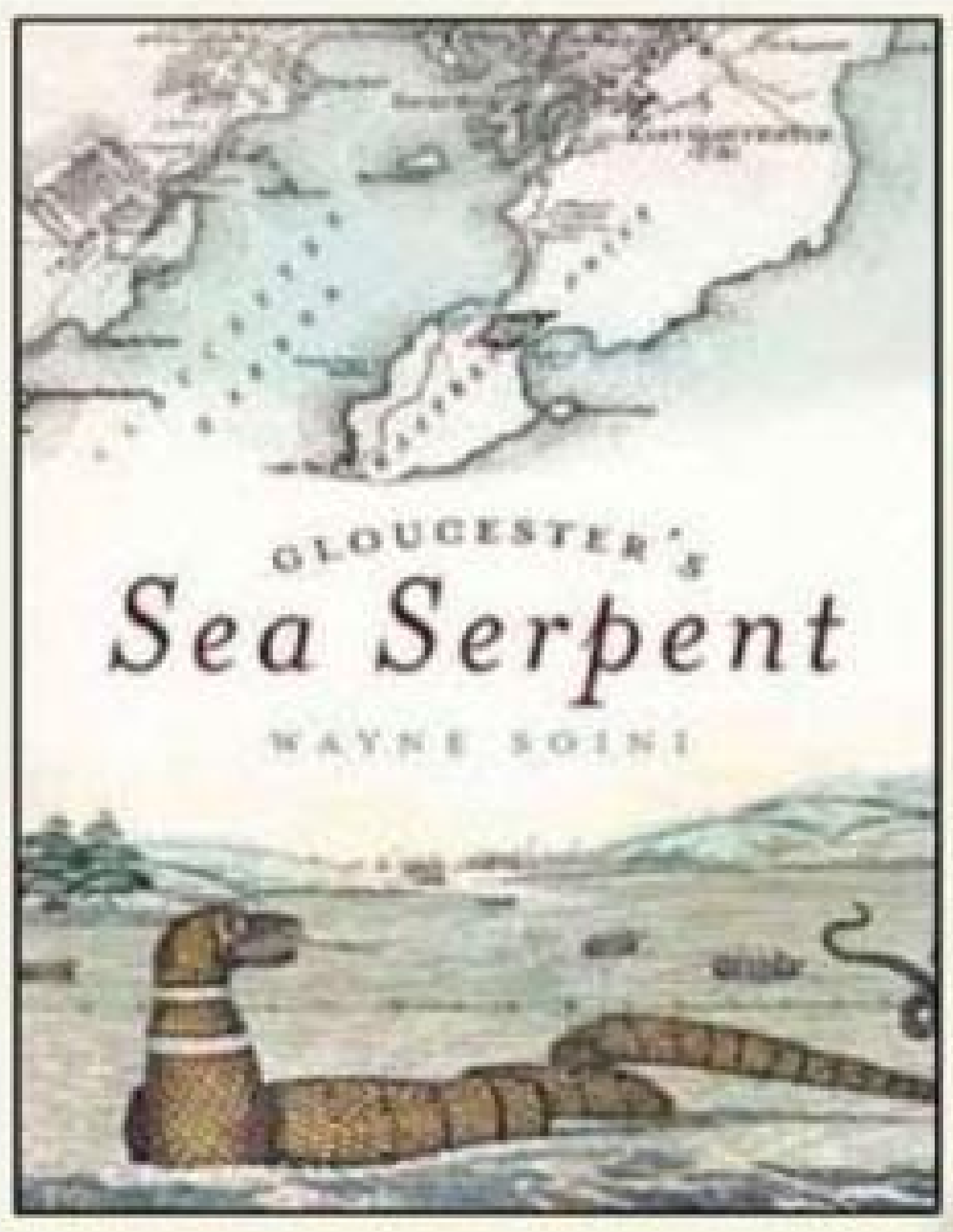

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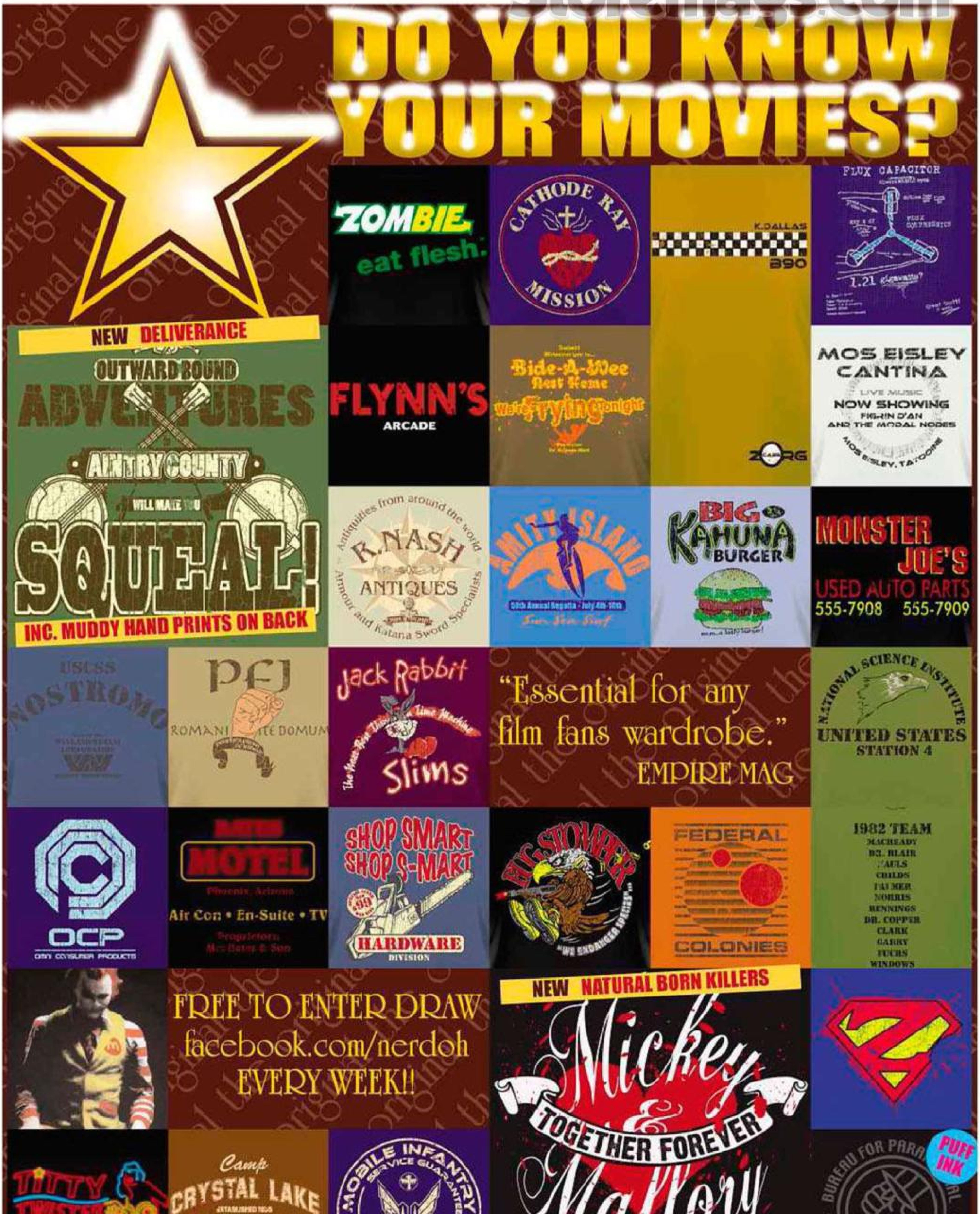

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Dear FT...

letters

Damned data

I was struck by the juxtaposition of the headline "Damned data" [**FT279:62**] with the discussion of Bayesian statistics on the facing page. It started me wondering why there aren't more statistical studies of damned data (fortean data, in other words). If you type "lies" into Google Instant it autocompletes to "Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics"... proving just how popular Disraeli's saying is. Few people trust statistical analysis, and I suspect most forteans don't. But the reason the data were "damned" in the first place is that they were rejected by conventional scientists from inclusion in their own analysis. So is there any hope for them?

Back in June 2000 [**FT135:46**], Ian Simmons wrote a short piece suggesting that the most appropriate tool for the analysis of fortean data was (wait for it...) Bayesian statistics: the very subject of *Gathering Time*, the book reviewed in **FT279:63**. In principle, I think Ian was absolutely spot on. The Bayesian method takes an even-handed approach to weighing up the relative probabilities of different hypotheses, based on the observed data – so it should be ideally suited to the fortean temperament. The problem is that for each of the competing hypotheses you need a mathematical model that allows you to calculate the probability of getting the observed data. This is fine when you're talking about things like radiocarbon dates (as in *Gathering Time*), but if you're trying to compare "the extraterrestrial hypothesis" with "the psychosocial hypothesis" (or whatever), then I strongly suspect it will be a case of garbage in, garbage out!

Andrew May
Crewkerne, Somerset

Extraordinary evidence

Two citations in the last issue of *FT* appear to contradict each other: "Carl Sagan's old saw that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence has been wheeled out" [**FT282:14**]; and "As Hume said [of miracles], 'Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence'." [**FT282:39**]

In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), David Hume wrote of miracles: "A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence." Later, the French mathematician Pierre Laplace (1749–1827) said: "The weight of evidence for an extraordinary claim must be proportioned to its strangeness." Marcello Truzzi, co-founder of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP – now the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry), is the originator of the saying: "An extraordinary claim requires extraordinary proof" (*On the Extraordinary: An Attempt at Clarification*, 1978), which Carl Sagan popularised as "'Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence".

Martin Stubbs
London

Snow, or moose?

Between the ages of one and three, my youngest brother was slow in picking up the English language. Having a Czech mother and an English father, he was spoken to in both languages, and there was no doubt that this reduced the speed at which he learnt words. A lot of his vocabulary at the time consisted of words that weren't quite Czech or English, but a jumble of the two.

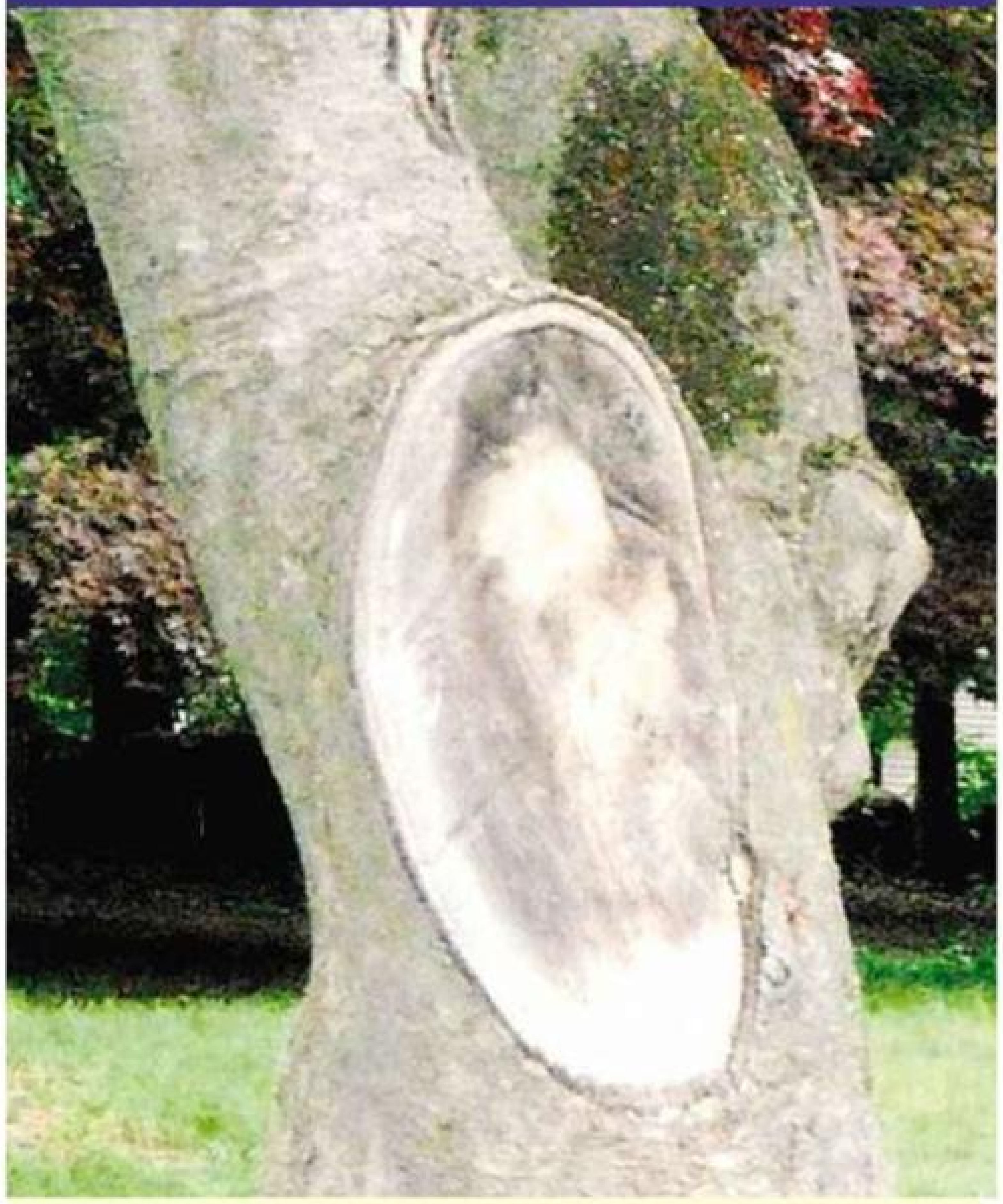
Of the many interesting words and mispronunciations he would come out with (though most escape me now), one of our favourites when he was two was his tendency to say "mooooose" instead of "snow". "Say 'S'", "S"; "Say 'no'", "No"; "Say 'snow'", "MOOOOSE!" It seemed completely random, very possibly put on, but nonetheless amused us all greatly.

He is now five and it has been about two years since he has been able to repeat the word 'snow' accurately (he 'moooose'ed for a solid year or so). However, the other day a friend of mine had a revelation that left us both quite thoughtful.

He had been reading a book, and on getting up to fetch a drink from the fridge, had left the book, pages splayed with the text facing away from him, on the table. As he returned to pick up the book, he picked out the word "snow". However, the book was upside down and he noticed something strange about this upside-down-version of the word that he recognised. On closer inspection and with the astonishment that accompanies realisation, he read aloud the word; "mous". I hope you find this as profound as we did.

Ellen Manners
By email

Simulacra Corner



Mathew Perrone saw this particularly vivid likeness of a bearded man (identified conventionally as 'Jesus') on a tree in Rockland County, New York State.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box at the top of the page (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – please tell us your postal address and we'll send you an exclusive ***Fortean Times*** *gift.*

Sicilian cows

Regarding the Mythchaser about cows [**FT282:17**]: I can confirm that in Sicily a reclining bovine is also seen as an indicator of approaching rain.

Frank Scannella
By email

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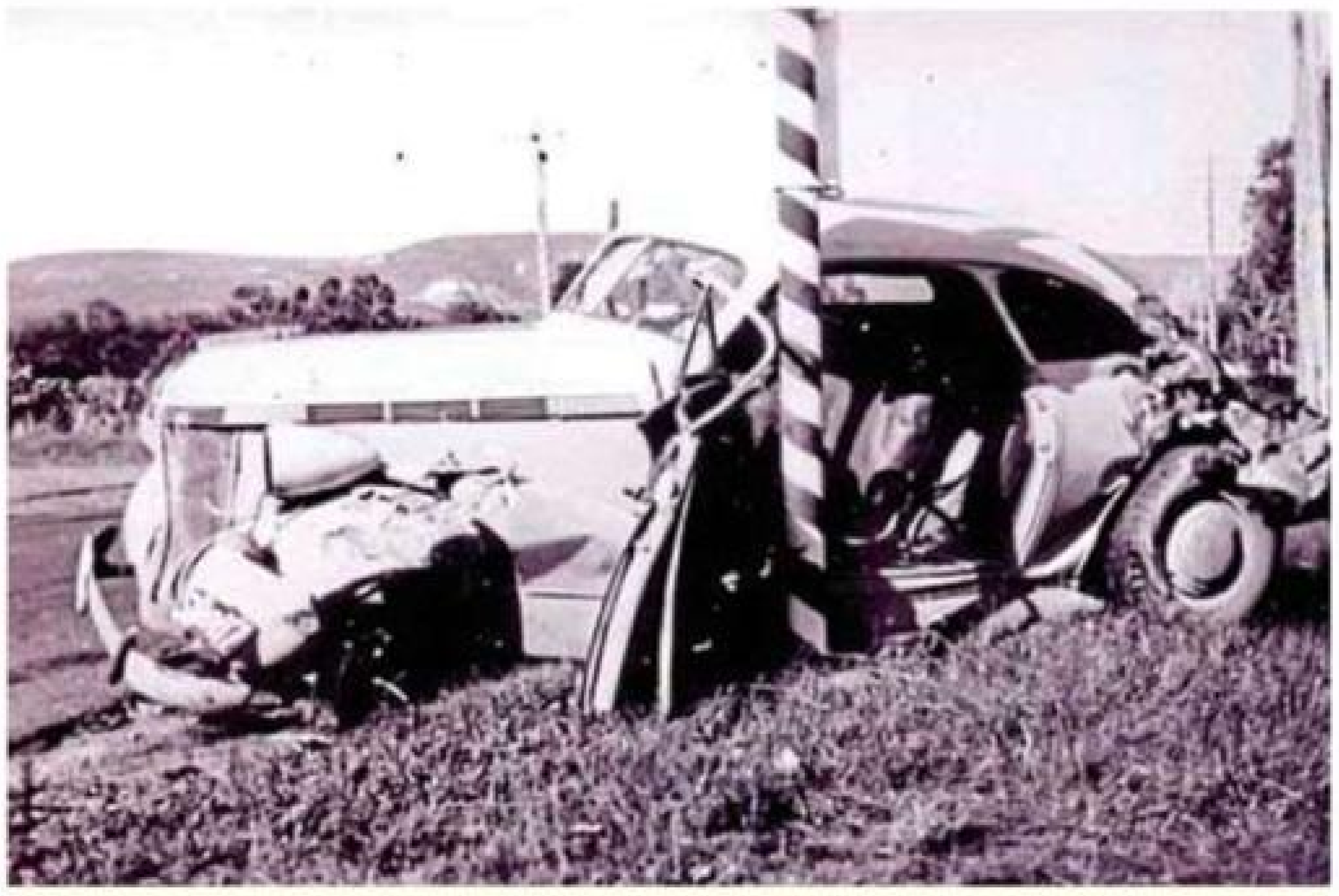

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GF Blissett
Honiton, Devon

Romantic jumpers

I have always been fascinated by that romantic entity of the 19th century known as "Spring-heeled Jack". In 1964, the late John Keel interviewed a woman and her son who lived on a farm in Ohio and had been the victims of cattle mutilations. Only the eyes, udders and uteri were taken. One day, the woman caught a glimpse of the culprits as she went after them in her pickup truck with a shotgun. She described tall men in white overalls who could jump an 8ft (2.4m) fence in a single leap.

In 1976, a young man was driving along a back road in the middle of the night on the Yakima Indian Reservation in Washington State when he saw a cow and two calves running towards him. He slowed down and saw they were being chased by three tall men wearing tight-fitting clothes and quarter boots. As the driver gaped in astonishment, one of the men did a slow-motion jump 15ft (4.6m) into the air and landed directly in front of his truck. The headlights revealed a 7ft (2.1m)-tall humanoid with a long nose and shoulder-length hair. His arms were raised and he seemed to be holding something in his left hand that had a wire running down his arm. As the driver turned to drive around this entity, he noticed his upper lip was in a permanent snarl like the rock star Billy Idol. As the young man fled the scene in terror, a spotlight from a UFO came on.

Have there been subsequent reports of these romantic jumpers?

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

Visitors to our planet

Witnesses suggest UFOs could be extraterrestrial space ships. Consideration should also be given to the notion that some might be non-intelligent individual alien life forms. Apparent intelligence may just be basic instinctive behaviour that – in their own environment – leads to survival and replication. For example, an instinctive "flight" (rather than "fight") response to perceived danger could explain why some UFOs are reported to zoom off when approached.

Natural selection on other planets opens up the possibility of biodiversity beyond our imagination, especially if evolved using non-carbon elements, non-solid states or light. Potential characteristics include rapid motion, convergent external resemblance to spherical – or "space ship" – shapes and interplanetary travel. The probability of encountering non-intelligent life forms that travel independently would depend upon the following factors: fraction of planets with life (as per Drake equation) x fraction of life forms that evolve interplanetary travel x total fecundity of organisms with interplanetary travel (number of organisms x rate of reproduction x average lifespan).

Max Cooper
Kings Lynn, Norfolk

Classic stuff

To my shock and horror, upon perusing my large pile of back issues of *FT*, I discovered I had missed reading one – August 2009. As is my wont, as a half-hearted classicist from a bygone age, I immediately went to Barry Baldwin's Classical Corner. He didn't disappoint – this was a real gem [**FT252:19**]. I always look at this column before any others, as it tends to put a spring in my step for the rest of the day. It's heartening to know that our illustrious classicist forebears were just as rude, lewd, lascivious, invidious and thoroughly reprehensible as any contemporary luminaries – nothing new under the Sun. If we think that we modern people have the market cornered on debauchery, treachery, murder, torture, rape and pædophilia – think again.

What I like about Barry's column – and I hope others will agree – is that it brings to modern audiences a real feel of the ancient world, and exposes its more modern commentators and translators, each as dodgy as the other. You really have to read this stuff to believe it. Classical literature (and the peer group who presume to comment on it) are not dry, dusty and irrelevant to modern times – they're a total hoot and very relevant to all of us. Barry humorises, and humanises, an age of great enlightenment and great darkness that most people would think to dismiss or bypass as being boring or beyond their remit.

I digress. The thrust of this letter – "Were it not for the doctors, there wouldn't be anything stupider than the professors." – Athenæus. If I may paraphrase and uplift this quotation to a more modern paradigm: "Were it not for the ufologists, there wouldn't be anything stupider than the paranormal investigators." Apologies to Athenæus, and nobody else, and I hope he would be proud.

Judy Jaafar (erstwhile ufologist, now paranormal investigator)
By email

Child revenant

A friend and work colleague recently bought a house in Worksop, Nottinghamshire, said to be over 300 years old, and began a steady programme of improvement, starting with the kitchen. Although a separate house, it was actually one third of a much larger farmhouse that had once been on the edge of town but had now been absorbed into the town as it grew. Of the three, his is effectively the 'left wing'.

He took an instant and intense dislike to a small bedroom; so did his 26-year-old daughter, who was also living there after her own flat purchase fell through. Neither could explain why. The room was drab and dark with only a small window letting in light. They decided to renovate this last, and in the meantime used it as a storeroom. They threw out a number of toys, damaged children's books, and a rickety wardrobe to create some space and make the best of what natural light there was. Even so, the room still left them both with a sense of unease. What's more, 'Duchess' the family mongrel, a generally happy animal ready to lick and slaver over all and sundry, refused to go anywhere near the room or for that matter the cellar – a favourite haunt of my friend's as he keeps his extensive wine and beer collection there.

stormags

Some weeks later, my friend's daughter went on a girls' night out to celebrate her team completing the Great North Run in aid of Breast Cancer Research. To her surprise, the main turn of the evening was a clairvoyant. I say surprise because it was supposed to be a cabaret night. She is a strong 'unbeliever' in such things and openly sceptical, but sat back to enjoy the show. I should point out that she is a pharmacist, not given to flights of fancy. Unfortunately, the show involved her, almost from the off. The clairvoyant singled her out and made a series of statements so accurate and impressive that she had to have the next day off work with the shock.

He told her that she had just moved house, and disliked a small room facing east. The reason for this was that the room had a ghost, a small child. She had heard the child crying, and had wrongly assumed it was the neighbour's baby – but while the neighbours have children, they have no baby. The child, a girl, was waiting for its parents to pass over (which suggests they are still alive) and was concerned about her toys which she wanted back, specifically 'the horses' which my friend's daughter realised were two broken toy unicorns that had been thrown away the previous week. The child also said that she watched every night as my friend's daughter read herself to sleep and wondered what it was she was reading as it looked interesting; and by the way could she have her baby books back? There were also comments about the colour of the rooms, wiring, potential problems with the fireplace (which as she stated was built into the house and embedded in bedrock) and choice of covering for the kitchen floor.

All of these and more proved to be entirely accurate, most impressively the colour of the room that was haunted. Through the clairvoyant, the child asked for it "not to be painted red again", a puzzle as the room was wallpapered and the paper painted mushroom. Even peeling back the layers of paper showed no hint of red – until it came to painting the doorframe. There, above the frame, almost imperceptible, was a thin line of red, the original colour. What she found most disconcerting was the concept of being observed.

None of this moved my friend much; in fact, having smartened up the room, he rented it out to a female friend, although in fairness he did tell her of the room's recent history. The new lodger, a shop manager, took it all very seriously and went to the trouble of bringing in books and toys for the ghost, and took to wishing it goodnight. Touchingly, she even left some Christmas cake – which was left untouched. The net result is that the gloom enveloping the room has been lifted, and even the dog is now prepared tentatively to enter the room (though not the cellar). But there was one small coda.

My friend – who incidentally has neither seen nor felt anything apart from his initial dislike of the room – likes a drink on a Friday night, and coming home tipsy one evening felt a great urge to open the door of the bedroom. In fact he couldn't stop himself, and wasn't happy until he'd gone upstairs, opened it and spragged it open for good measure. He then realised why – the toys and books had been turfed out and left on the landing by his mother who had popped in to tidy up. The ghost had 'suggested' to him that he either put them back or opened the door to give her access.

Shortly after this, the lodger/girlfriend was taken aback to see her collection of small perfume atomisers neatly lined up in order of size, and her collection of Steiff bears all gently turned round and positioned so they could see out of the window. It seems that the phantom child has a tidy mind.

At a party, the group in the house mentioned the presence of a ghost to one of the guests, who happened to have an interest in the occult and was one of a group who took 'astral photos' that showed up golden globes. Without further ado, she went upstairs with her camera and began snapping furiously in the dark, at which 'a force' threw her down a flight of stairs (a fair amount of drink was involved) – but her photos showed not one, but dozens of orbs of various sizes.

It appears that this little ghost is confined to that room and its immediate environs but can nevertheless see or sense everything that goes on in the house, a kind of prison with a roving panorama. The clairvoyant has since contacted them to offer his services in helping the ghost to move on, but frankly the three in the house have grown used to it and feel quite protective towards her. I have been sworn to the utmost secrecy regarding the identity of those involved, as the whole thing sounds a bit far-fetched and they might want to sell the house in due course, even though the ghost told them they would live there a long time and be very happy. My father knew one of the previous owners of the house, but he could throw no light on the haunting; he did say, however, that the house had been sold very cheaply several times in quick succession.

Jack Romano
By email

Not the drink

People who claim to have seen UFOs, ghosts, or other paranormal phenomena are frequently accused of being drunk. To 'see' a ghost in a pub is the ultimate expression of this, as is the sighting of a UFO on the way home from a hostelry. I object to this sceptical presumption. As a habitual drunk-getter, I can authoritatively say that being in this state does not cause one to hallucinate. In fact, in order for one to imagine that one has seen something odd when drunk, it really has to be very odd. I could chat away in a pub for hours with a semi-translucent man without questioning his apparent non-corporeality. And I have more than once experienced displays of inexplicable lights while returning from my local via a disused railway line, which, had I experienced when sober, would have scared me silly.

No, to suggest that anything out of the ordinary can be written off as the delirious delusions of a reveller is the laziest form of scepticism there is. I myself am a sceptic – about pretty much everything. But it wasn't always so: my interest in all things paranormal started at around the age of 10. It took me 20 years of reading and thought to figure out that, well, yes, it's probably all bollocks.

The landlord of a local pub of mine, a Tudor building, recently gave me a tour of his establishment, after I drunkenly expressed an interest in its extensive history. I was escorted to the cellar, which he informed me used to house the horses, four centuries ago. Even before he told me this, I was overcome by the smell of horses; but I did not assign this to equine ghosts, because it seemed reasonable to me that a damp cellar might have a slightly horsey odour about it. Likewise, on a foray onto said dilapidated railway line with my sister, we both experienced an odd phenomenon. I was wearing a pair of rubber-toed canvas shoes, and Kezia a pair of white trainers. At a certain point on the path, both sets of our shoes began to glow ultraviolet. We did not immediately assume that it was the work of extraterrestrials, but instead worked to find a rational explanation. We came up with marsh gas, incidentally.

Had I mentioned this happening in public, the nay-sayers would have raised their collective arms in glee, and pointed out that we were drunk when this happened. Well, obviously we were. It was midnight, and we were hanging around a deserted path that happens to lie between the pub and my house. But our drunkenness accounts for us being there. It does not account for everything inexplicable that has ever happened to anyone who experienced something odd while out of doors at night.

Lindsay Horne
By email

GODSTOPPERS
doRodo

JOHN ROBERT DOCHERTY

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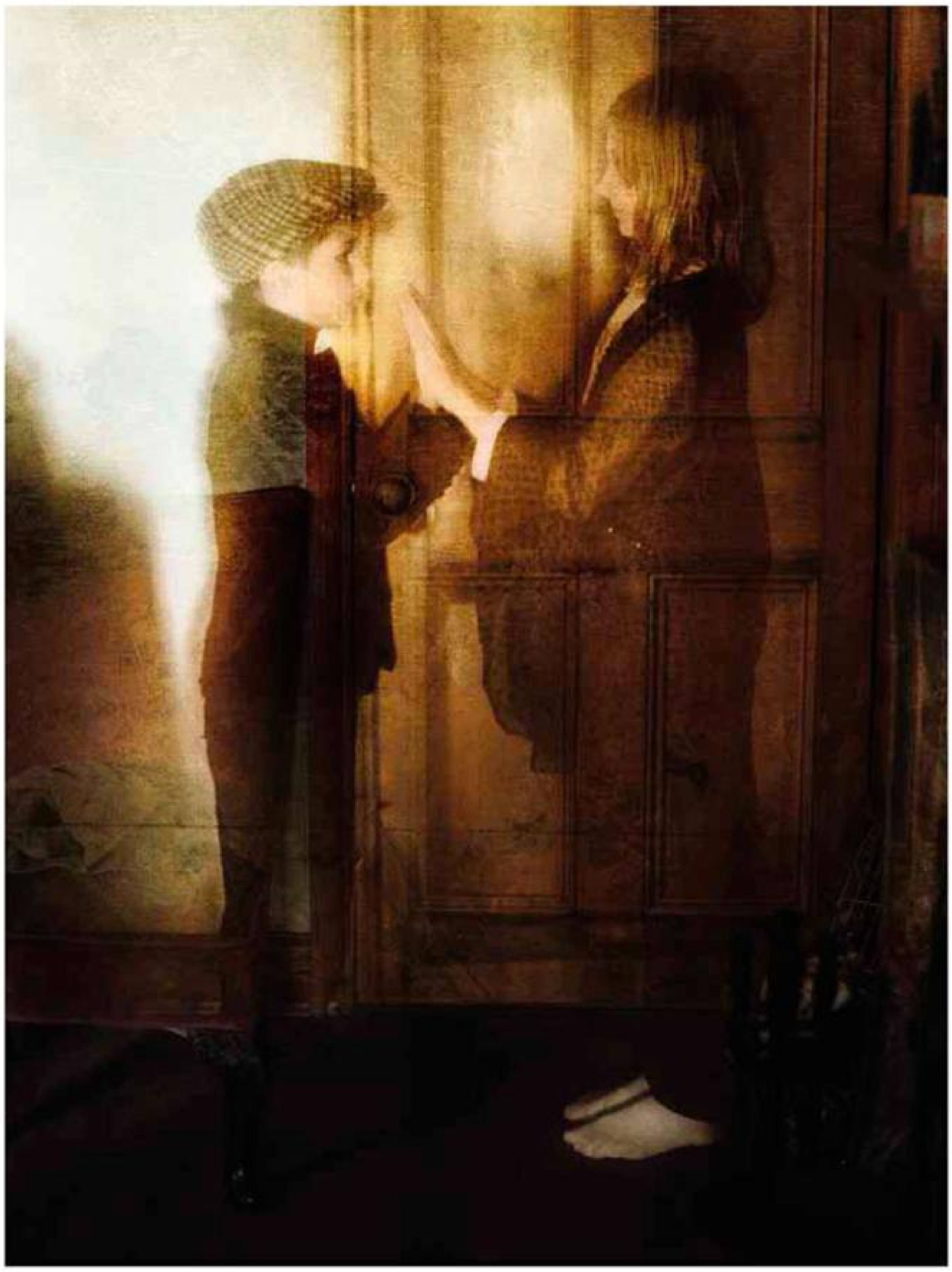
Pat-a-cake

The year was 1983 and I was working just off Regent Street in London. At the time, I was living in a squalid but very cheap house in Romford Road, Stratford, which for various reasons I had to vacate. I needed to find somewhere quickly. I bought a copy of the *Evening Standard* and, browsing through the bedsits, I came across an advert for Deans Road in Hanwell. I called and made an appointment for later that day, and at 6.30 was met at the door by the landlady, who showed me around. The room was very small, but big enough for me, so I said I would take it. I don't think the landlady was too keen, probably due to my long hair and leather jacket, and she said she had other viewings later. I produced my last three weeks' wages and offered to pay two months' rent up front. The sight of the cash swayed her, and I was to move in that weekend.



ETIENNE GILFILLAN

On the following Saturday, my friend drove me round with my entire possessions, which fitted into two small cardboard boxes on the back seat, and I moved in. The room was about 8x10ft (2.4x3m), with a low ceiling. The window overlooked the back garden, which was about 40ft (12m) long, with a small path at the end that ran parallel to a large brick wall that was the boundary to a cemetery. My bed ran along the wall at right angles to the window so when I was lying down I faced away from the window towards the door. I soon settled in and got on very well with the landlady, to the point where she let me keep my motorbike at the bottom of the garden.

I think I am right in saying I am a fairly open-minded person, and solidly grounded in thought and common sense. The first of two encounters occurred in early September 1983. I had arrived home, not too late in the evening, having had a few beers in town. I would say I was merry rather than drunk, and went to bed as soon as I got in and fell asleep.

> "The next thing I remember is waking up rather suddenly, looking across the room to the far wall and seeing two children – a girl and a shorter little boy"

The next thing I remember is waking up rather suddenly, looking across the room to the far wall and seeing two children. One was a little girl wearing what looked like a nightgown or one-piece dress with no shoes on. The other was a shorter little boy, who reminded me of Tiny Tim from Dickens, in a buttoned-up shirt and short trousers held up with braces. He had shoes and socks on. They were facing each other playing the old clapping game pat-a-cake. I looked at them and looked at the clock, which said 1.30am. I looked back at them and they were still there. They seemed oblivious to my presence. I slowly sat up and swung my legs out of bed and sat facing them. I remember pinching myself to check if I was awake or hallucinating. I put my specs on, and could focus on them quite clearly. I remember being scared but fascinated. I watched them play pat-a-cake for what seemed like five minutes or more, when suddenly they vanished in a way I can only describe as like switching a light off. I sat there puzzling over what had happened for a while and then fell asleep.

I woke the next morning with no hangover and remembered everything, but I did wonder if it had been a dream or hallucination caused by beer and imagination. I came to the conclusion that it had been real and I had actually been visited by two apparitions. A few days later at work, I mentioned the incident in conversation and was surprised because everyone was fascinated. It was suggested I keep a camera next to my bed and get a photograph and, in hindsight, I should have prepared for this.

It was at least three weeks later that I had my second and final encounter. I arrived home early evening – sober, as I had had nothing to drink. I watched some TV and went to bed and fell asleep.

Later, I awoke again quite suddenly, but this time I was wide-awake instantly. I was facing the inner wall and sensed something was happening. I rolled over and there they were, the same two children playing pat-a-cake. All fear disappeared, replaced with excitement. I sat up and stared at them. I checked the clock: it had just gone 1.30am. This time, they had more of a glow to them, yet cast no light on the walls. They seemed semi-transparent, but at the same time quite solid and three-dimensional. They looked as if they were being lit by moonlight through a window. Sitting up on the bed, I was no more than five feet (1.5m) away. I said "Hello", but they were again oblivious to my presence. I started talking to myself – and, yes, I was awake, I was sober and this was happening. Then, as before, they disappeared, only this time I would describe it as more of a long fade-out than a light going out suddenly.

I was alone in the room, wide-awake and amazed. I looked at the clock and about 15 minutes had passed. I stood where they had been and looked out of the window towards the cemetery, and wondered.

I later spoke of this second encounter to others, and they said I must go and check out the cemetery. I said I would, at some point, and part of me really wanted to go and find them and be excited, while part of me didn't want to go and be disappointed at not finding them; and another part was a bit scared of going in case I *did* find them! In the end, I didn't go and have a look. That was only to happen 10 years later.

Soon after the second encounter, I moved away to south-east London. Then, in 1988, I moved back to Ealing, which was about three miles (4.8km) away from Hanwell. Work and hobbies had totally consumed my life and the thought of going back had all but vanished, until one day at work I was talking to someone who remembered the incident and asked if I had ever followed it up. This time, I decided to follow it up, and went that following Sunday.

The City of Westminster Cemetery, Hanwell, is along the Uxbridge Road and has a very impressive entrance. It was a sunny day as I walked around the inner edge of the cemetery path that follows the wall around. I got to a point on the path where it suddenly goes very straight for a distance. I could just see over the wall to the line of houses in Deans Road and started to examine the graves along the wall while trying to pinpoint my room. The cemetery is very well maintained and tidy and I appeared to be the only person there that morning.

I came to a point where I could see the house. It was easy to spot due to the path running between the house next door that actually separates the row of semis and is the path I used to gain entrance to the back garden for my motorbike. I started to look more closely at the gravestones and was startled to find one so quickly that was interesting, but it was of a young boy only. I looked up and it was directly opposite the house. However, something inside said that this was not it so I should carry on. I actually started to feel disappointed.

As I walked further, I thought I might be wasting my time and that perhaps I had imagined it all, when suddenly I was stopped in my tracks. Facing me was a tombstone partly covered by an overhanging small tree branch. What had stopped me was part of the inscription still visible below the branch. It said:

"They lived together, and played together, and in death they were not divided".

I stood there shaking. I looked up and could see the house to my right. I looked back at the stone and moved the branch. The rest of the inscription read as follows:

In Loving memory of Lilian Eleanor aged 6
And William Bertie aged 4
The beloved children of William and Eleanor Lock.
Died 23rd Sept 1892
They lived together and played together
And in death they were not divided

I was sure I had found my two little friends. I truly believe something occurred on those two nights and somehow I was able to see Lilian and William. Now that they had names I found the moment quite upsetting and stayed there for about an hour, just thinking and wondering what had happened to them. Had they been killed while playing in some sort of accident?

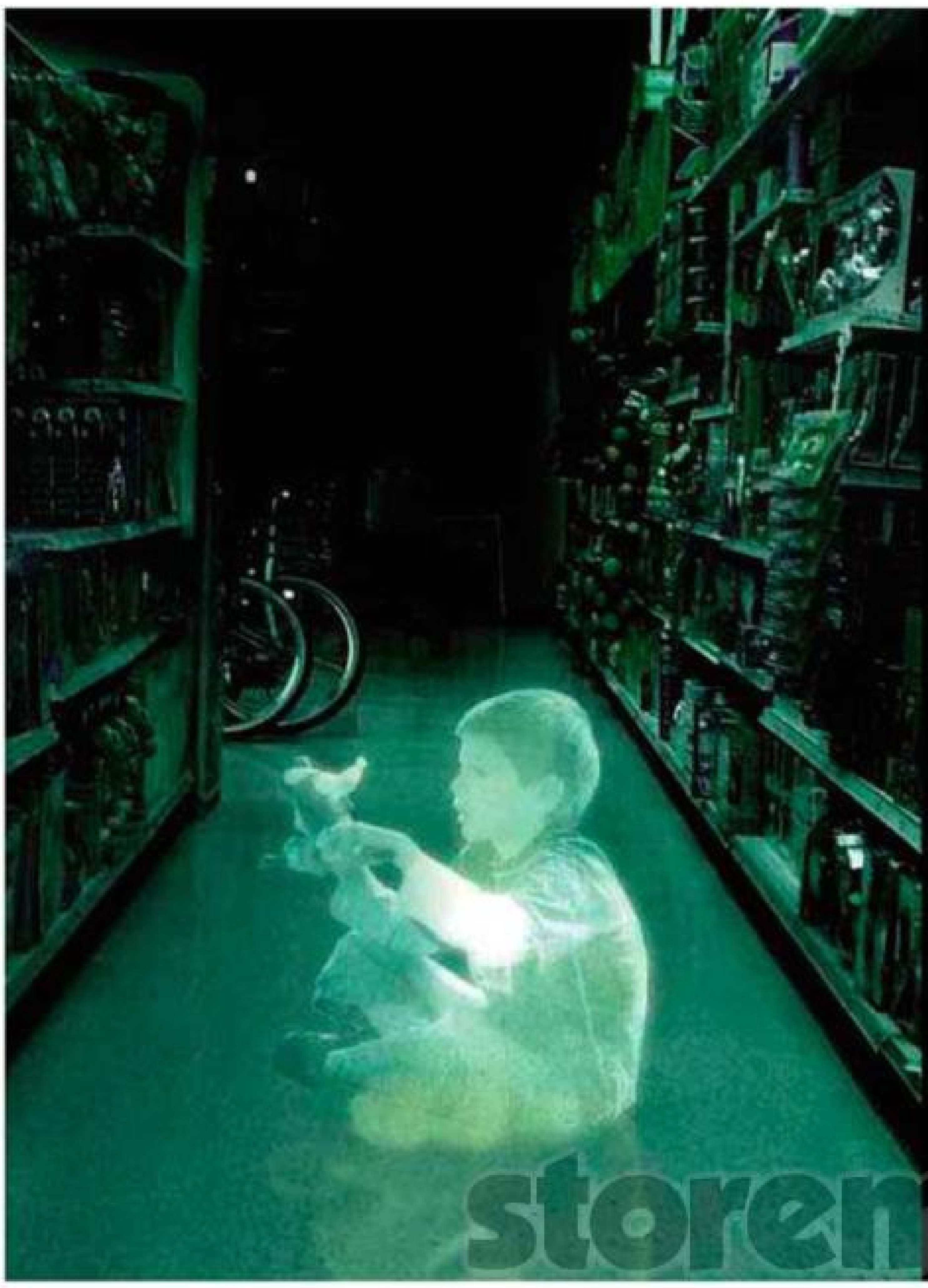
Moving forward to 2010 – I was talking with a friend who has an interest in genealogy, and we found their names in the Registry of Births and Deaths on the Internet. I sent off for a copy of the death certificates. Three weeks later, they arrived. As I began to open them a sense of sadness prevailed because I was about to find out what happened to my little visitors.

The certificates had consecutive numbers. Both children had died on 23 September at Western Hospital of diphtheria. Their father William Lock was in attendance and gave his home address.

We found and viewed his house on Google Earth and I sat there and felt a little bit closer to Lilian and Bertie knowing that this was their home, but also very sad and actually quite guilty and intrusive. I thought, who was I to intrude on their pain and suffering? I felt for their father, how terrible to see both of your young children die on the same day.

When they appeared, it was 110 years to the month that they died. That may have had some significance, I don't know. The house I was in has no direct link, only that it is about 80ft (24m) from their grave. What I do know is that I feel privileged to have seen them playing their last game of pat-a-cake.

John Swinnerton
By email



ETIENNE GILFILLAN

The boy in the toy store

About 10 years ago, I worked as a cashier in a toy store – the tiny cramped kind you find in shopping malls. As you might imagine, these stores get torn apart by eager young children every day, and a big part of the closing procedure is straightening the shelves up for the next day.

At this store, we had four aisles. The second aisle contained the "boy-toys" – action figures, cars, guns, and so on – and had always been my favourite, where I always enjoyed looking at all the toys while I cleaned.

On this particular night, I had just finished the "boy" aisle, and had gone around to work on the "girl" aisle next to it. I had gotten all the way back to the front of the aisle when I looked up. We had mirrors on the ceiling, which allowed us to look from one aisle into the next, and thus keep an eye on potential shoplifters. What I saw in the mirrors was a little kid, no more than four or five years old, holding an action figure in his hand. He was crouched down, almost squatting. Having a kid in the store after closing was a big deal, since we'd have to call the police and report an abandoned or lost child.

I was no more than three feet (90cm) away from him – all I had to do was step around the aisle that separated us, which would take a moment. So, I stepped around the end of the aisle, started to say something, and stopped.

The kid was gone. Just gone. There was no place for him to hide, and no time for him to have run back down the aisle. He had just vanished.

The action figure was still on the floor – the only out-of-place toy on the aisle I had cleaned not 10 minutes before.

I told my manager, who said he'd had a similar experience, only on that occasion the little boy had ducked under a table with a big white tablecloth over it. Two seconds later, the manager had lifted the cloth to find no one there.

It must be hell to haunt a toy store and not be able to open all the packages.

Charles Green
By email

FORTEAN TRAVELLER

77. The Ghost Skulls of Bangkok

PAUL KOUDOUNARIS continues investigating unusual ways of displaying old bones by visiting Thailand, where even dead paupers have guardians.

เหล่าเอ็กแป๊ะกง

PAUL KOUDOUNARIS

ABOVE: Payom Chanampet explained the history of the gilded skulls.

The translator listened to a lengthy exegesis in Thai, then turned to deliver a brief summation: "They are what I believe you call in English the 'Undead.'" The "they" in question are a group of 12 gilded human skulls. Encrusted with decades' worth of gold leaf and gold paint, and with small gold lamé cushions inserted in their eye sockets, they sit in a red lacquer shrine at an office of the charitable Ruamkatanyu Foundation in Bangkok, Thailand. Sensing that his explanation might have been a bit miserly, the translator proceeded to offer a bit more: "They are not undead in an evil, 'Dracula' sort of way, because they are protective – they guard the body of the deceased and provide comfort to their spirits during the period between death and the disposal of the body. Basically, they perform a public service."

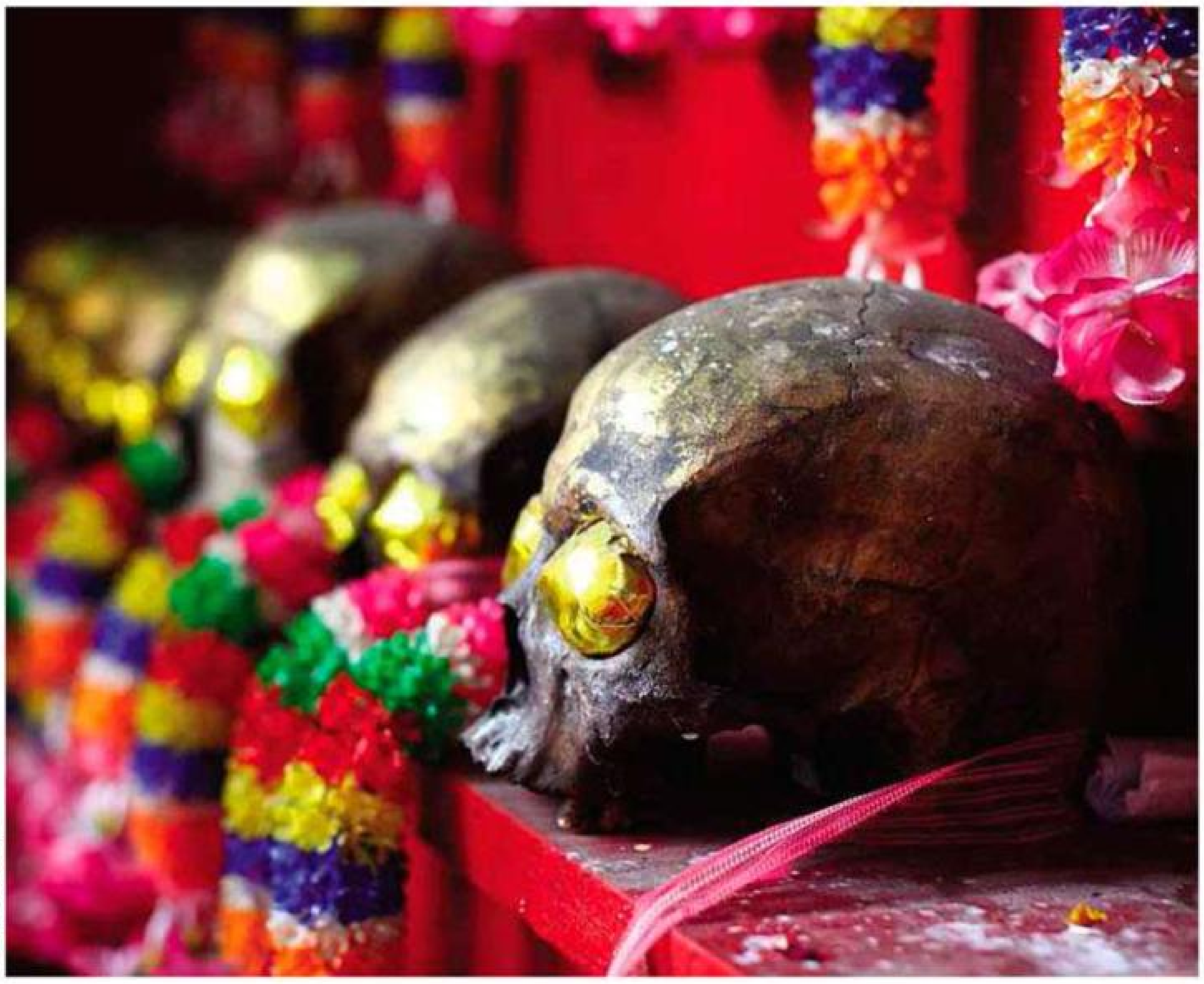
The skulls are the patrons of dead paupers and John Does

Bangkok is a city famed for its quirkiness, but even here the 12 skulls top all contenders as the city's strangest religious shrine. They are located near the port, near the canal Klong Toei, in a warehouse used as the foundation's distribution point for their free coffin programme. Ruamkatanyu provides coffins free of charge for the use of low-income families or for bodies which remain unclaimed from city hospitals and morgues; one needs merely to come to the warehouse and ask for a coffin, and an inexpensive wooden model with a plastic lining will be provided.

The foundation has always had funereal associations, with its origins dating to a merchant named Somikiat who, out of the goodness of his heart, began paying for funerals for poor people. The skulls, set just inside the doorway of the warehouse, are considered patrons of dead paupers and unidentified 'John Does', and their dozen spirits spread out to cover different parts of the city and watch over the newly deceased. The roving spirits help ensure that no harm comes to the body before it is placed in a coffin (often one of the foundation's own) or otherwise disposed of with dignity. Equally importantly, they prevent the spirits of the dead from lingering and becoming ghosts by comforting them in their time of transition. In a society in which ghosts are regarded as a palpable force, this is considered an invaluable service. Ausanat Chaiyakhot, who lives on a street near the warehouse, explains that the souls of people who are poor, anonymous, or somehow socially marginalised are the most likely to linger in a harmful way. "Especially if they die of mistreatment or starvation, or through a violent act or accident," she says, "and if the corpse is not tended to properly, they can become ghosts and act negatively. But the skulls at Ruamkatanyu console their spirits, and represent a charitable element of society which cares about their well-being and assists them in a peaceful passage."

In a curious twist to the story, the skulls originally had nothing to do with either the coffins or protection of the dead. The shrine was built by a volunteer ambulance company, also affiliated with Ruamkatanyu, which used the same headquarters. According to Payom Chanampet, who works at the Ruamkatanyu warehouse, the 12 skulls are those of early ambulance patients who died while being transported to hospital and whose bodies were never claimed by a family. This apparently explains their affinity with the unidentified dead – the skulls also were once among the anonymous dead. Because their bodies were unclaimed, the ambulance company took the skulls and constructed a shrine for them. This was some 60 years ago, according to Chanampet, and the skulls have been present in the building ever since. Chaiyakhot, whose mother also lived in the neighbourhood and was familiar with the skulls, confirms that they were installed around 1950; and she fills in other details. Apparently, with the bodies unclaimed, the ambulance company took charge and performed a ceremony in which they were cremated, and kept the skulls afterward, having them cleaned and gilded, then constructed the shrine to honour them.

When the ambulance company


PAUL KOUDOUNARIS

eventually abandoned the warehouse, however, they decided to leave the shrine behind. This may sound callous, but the decision was related to the idiosyncratic nature of Bangkok's ambulance providers. The government's own official service has always been very small, and stretched to the limits of its capacity (even today, there are only 150 ambulances, serving a metropolitan area of some 10 million people). This is why volunteer ambulance groups have become a local staple, and they provide a way for 'Good Samaritans' to help perform a necessary public service. The volunteer groups can be highly competitive, however. It is claimed that some hospitals offer kickbacks for having patients delivered, and ambulance companies arriving on the same scene have been known to fight over patients. They are locally nicknamed "bodysnatchers", and there are even substantiated accounts of volunteer ambulance crews attacking each other with guns and knives to secure patients for transport.

In this competitive environment, and with a cabinet full of gilded skulls, accusations began to circulate that the ambulance company which had built the shrine was practising cannibalism and performing witchcraft aimed against other service providers. "Some people claimed that they were using the skulls to cast spells on rival ambulance groups, so they could get all the patients," Chaiyakhot explains. "I am sure this was not true, but I think it was creating a negative public opinion. I think that is why they were happy to leave the skulls behind." But the crania have found a new life, so to speak, shepherding the dead into Ruamkatanyu's coffins. They have become esteemed members of the local community, and both those who work at the foundation and live nearby pray to them. Chanampet even notes that there is now a special yearly holiday set aside to honour them, during which the skulls are regilded and elaborate offerings are made. "They are important to us," he explains, "and it is good fortune to have their assistance in the foundation." **FT**

ABOVE AND BELOW: The richly decorated displays of old skulls in Thailand's capital.

PAUL KOUDOUNARIS teaches Baroque Art History. He has written *Empire of Death: A Social and Cultural History of Charnel Houses and Ossuaries* (Thames & Hudson, 2011).

PAUL KOUDOUNARIS

STRANGE AND SENSATIONAL STORIES FROM

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LAW COURTS AND WEEKLY RECORD

JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England"

9. THE CAT WOMAN OF ROTTINGDEAN

Robert Dennis Chantrell was a distinguished architect, a pupil of Sir John Soane, and the designer of many churches in Yorkshire and elsewhere. In 1846, he retired aged just 53 and settled in London. In addition to his wife, the mother of his eight children, he kept a mistress, Mary Elizabeth Dear, an aspiring artist whom he had met at the Society of Arts. After the death of his wife in 1863, Chantrell settled down with his mistress at Ivy Cottage, a large detached property facing the High Street of the seaside village of Rottingdean, not far from Brighton. Since Miss Dear was not always of sound mind, Chantrell appointed himself her guardian. Her habits were very odd: she fancied herself as a painter, and wanted to keep large numbers of animals for use as models. She was particularly fond of cats, keeping no fewer than 100 of these animals, of all shapes and sizes.

But although he was formally her guardian, the aging Chantrell was entirely incapable of controlling his demented, cat-hoarding paramour. She had several times made forays into the yards and gardens of her neighbours in Rottingdean to extend her collection of cats. In February 1866, after a certain Mr Moody had lost three favourite cats, Miss Dear was suspected of having stolen them. After the police and magistrate had been called in, a search warrant was executed. When searched, Ivy Cottage and its outhouses were found to contain 150 living cats, and 50 dead ones; there were also 15 dogs, and a tame fox. The whole place was in a very filthy state, and the stench was awful. Six dead cats were putrefying in Miss Dear's bedroom. Chantrell was sternly ordered by the magistrate to clean up this nuisance.

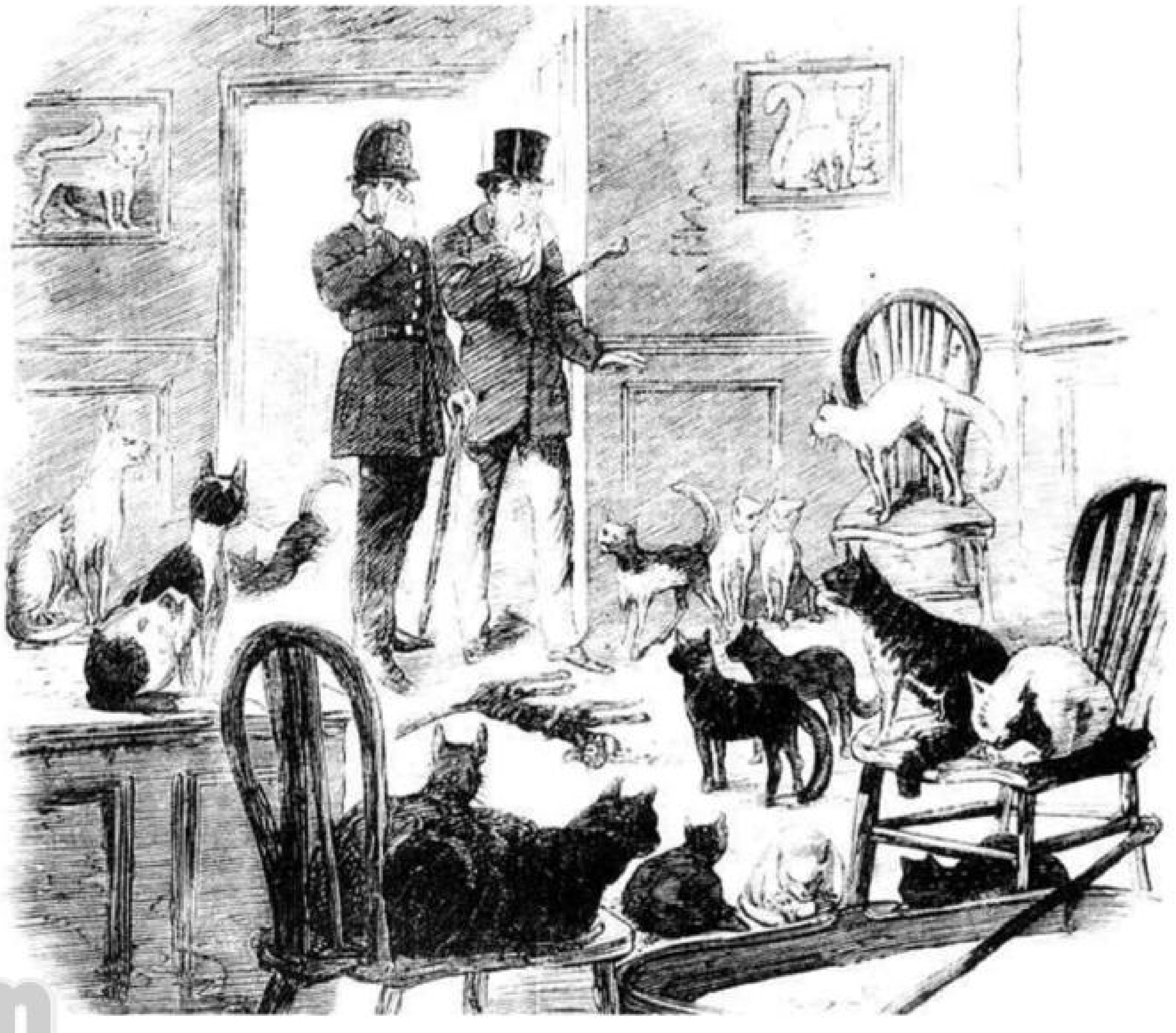
In May 1867, the Rottingdean surgeon Mr J Noakes, inspector of nuisances to the Newhaven board of guardians, was ordered to inspect the house, due to the very noxious smell emanating from these premises. In the garden, 50 cats were running about, and in the kitchen, a similar number were making themselves comfortable in front of the fire. In a yard nearby, Mr Noakes saw upwards of 20 cats, a fox, a goat, and many turkeys, geese, and fowl of every description. He estimated the total number of cats on the premises as more than 100, some of them very dirty. Since the excrement of all these cats had not been removed for many months, the smell was "offensive in the extreme and most injurious to health". When summoned before the Lewes petty sessions, Chantrell again said that all the animals belonged to his ward Miss Dear, who fancied herself as an animal painter. She was a great friend of the feline species, making regular trips to purchase more of these animals. The bench of magistrates ordered Chantrell to abate the nuisance in three days, or the animals would have to be removed.

The old architect was at his wits end. He was quite a feeble old man, and to add to his worries, Miss Dear had recently been arrested for debt. Even seven maids with seven mops would have faced a stern challenge to clean up this Rottingdean Augean stable; the dotard Robert Dennis Chantrell and his elderly, long-suffering domestics were entirely unable to remove the accumulated filth of several years of neglect. Due to the vile smell emanating from Ivy Cottage, Chantrell was extremely unpopular locally: people booed and hooted him, and once he was slapped in the face with a wet fish, since his filthy house stank out all of Rottingdean. After he had unwisely put up a sign in one of his front windows, saying that a Londoner could never find peace among such uneducated country bumpkins, the locals made a sport of breaking his windows at night.

When Ivy Cottage was again inspected by Mr Noakes, things had not improved in the slightest. The healthy animals were taken away, the sick or starving ones put down, and Chantrell was presented with a hefty bill for all the cleaning work. With the help of a solicitor, he managed to pay his debts, and bail Miss Dear out of prison. What she said when she saw the spotlessly clean Ivy Cottage, and the nine cats that had been allowed to remain after the holocaust, is unfortunately not known. Chantrell had escaped to Belgium to avoid the wrath of the Cat Woman.

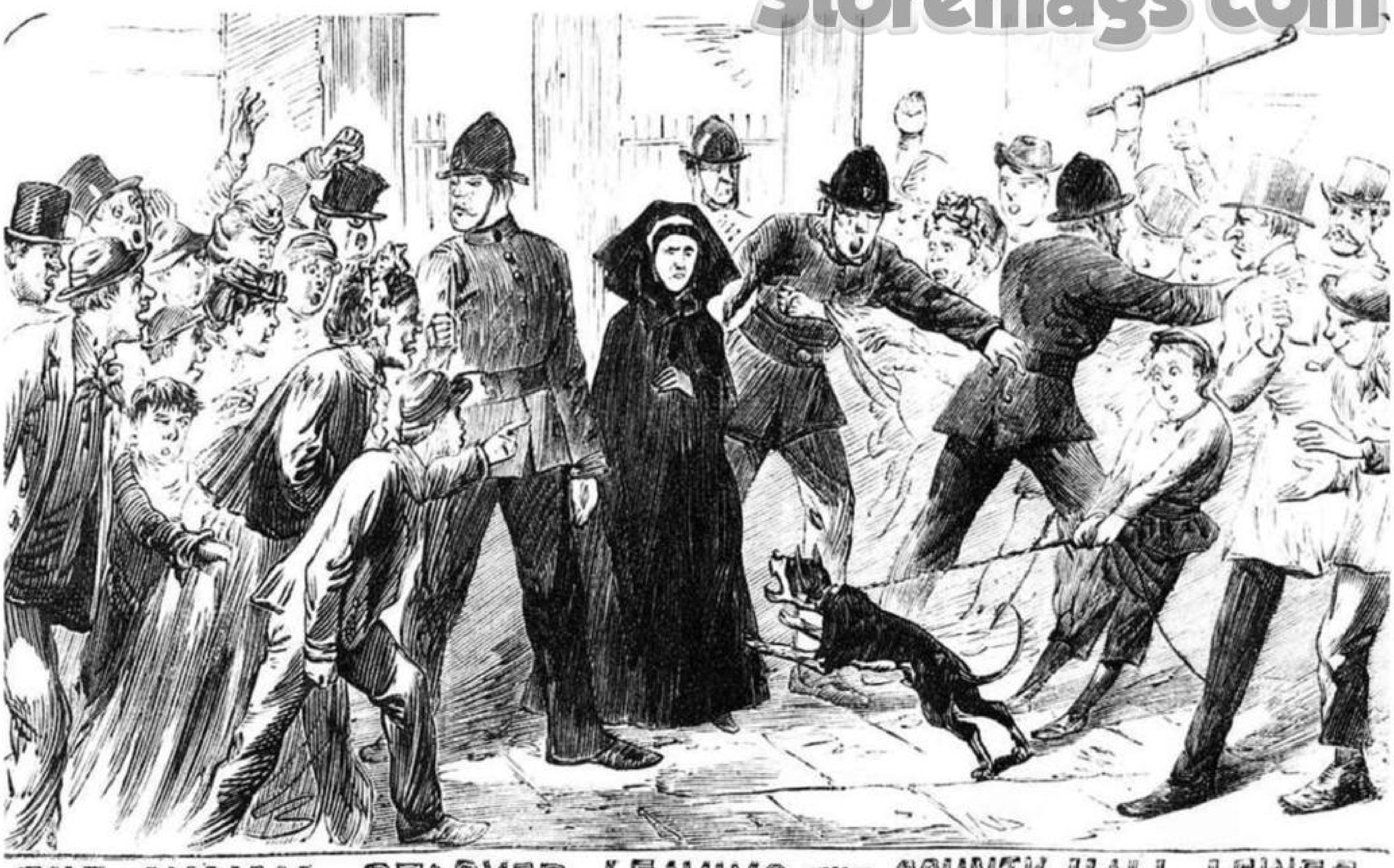
There was eventually a reconciliation between the 75-year-old former architect and the 36-year-old cat hoarder. After she had claimed she was pregnant, Chantrell offered to marry her. The old architect's children from his previous marriage of course did their best to dissuade him from marrying such a lunatic, but there is no fool like an old fool: this mismatched couple wed at the Old Church, St Pancras, and later had a daughter, Marion Felicia, presumed to have been fathered by Chantrell.

As could be expected, the marriage between these two oddballs was not a particularly happy one. The Cat Woman began collecting animals again, and appeared to lose her wits altogether. Her fierce and angry temper, and the smell and filth of the

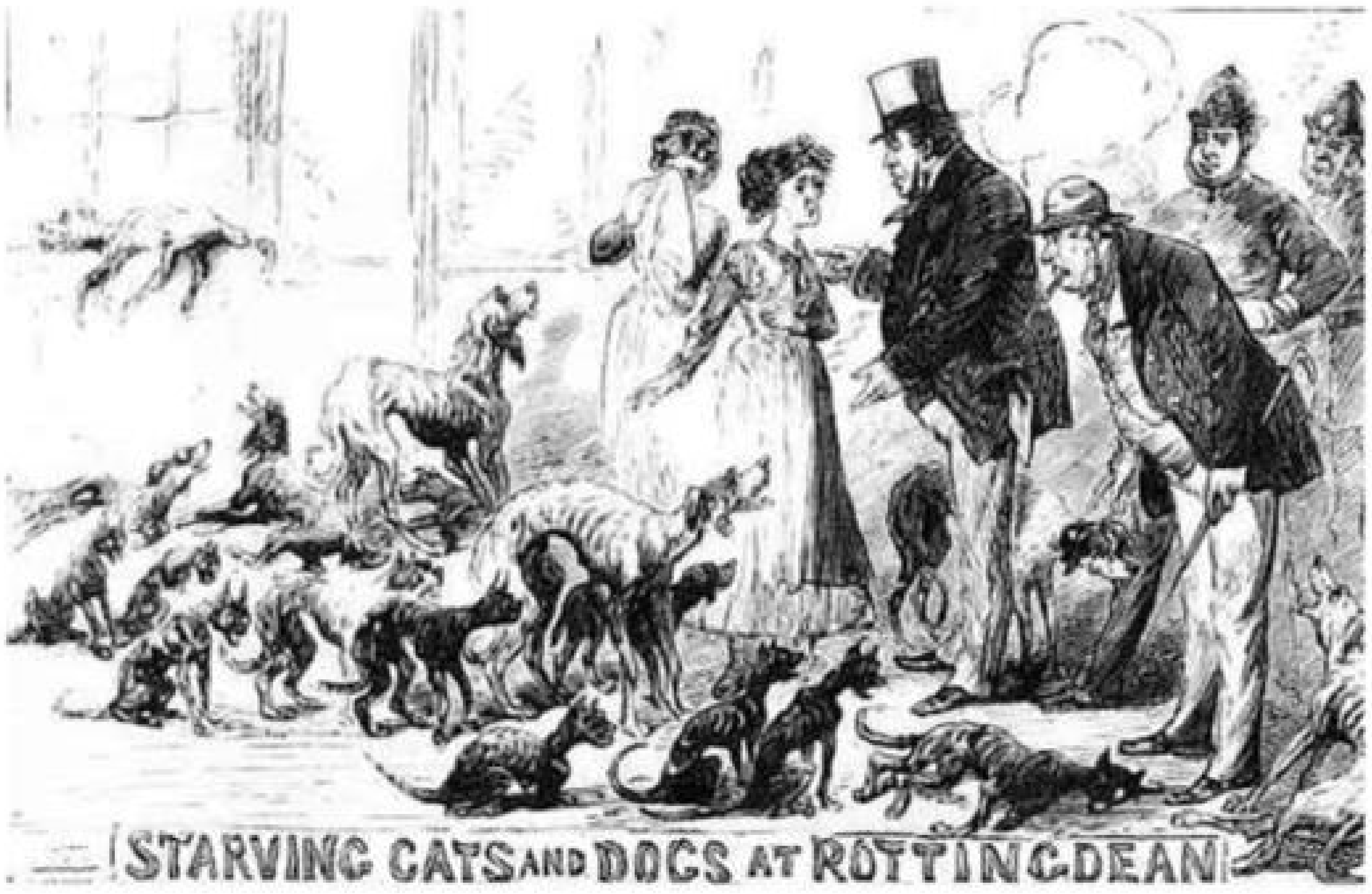


ABOVE: An extraordinary collection of cats, *Illustrated Pollice News, 1 June 1867.*

FACING PAGE: Further illustrations of the Rottingdean Cat Woman case, *Illustrated Pollice News, August 1872.*



THE ANIMAL STARVER LEAVING THE COUNTY HALL LEWES



STARVING CATS AND DOGS AT ROTTINGDEAN

animals, forced old Chantrell to escape to lodgings in Croydon, where he expired in January 1872. His entry in the Dictionary of National Biography mentions nothing about his sad declining years.

Later in 1872, the Cat Woman of Rottingdean was again prosecuted, this time for cruelty to animals. She had left 18 dogs and 14 cats to starve after going away, and not leaving the domestics with enough money to feed them. The dogs had eaten the fowl, and some of the cats, for want of proper nourishment. In court, the Cat Woman objected that her husband's sons from his previous marriage were contesting his will, leaving her to struggle for money. She was fined £5, with costs in excess of £15, and harshly warned that if she kept hoarding animals, and did not look after them properly, she would be sent to prison. The angry locals booed her all the way to the railway station. After the *Illustrated Police News* had published a feature on this case, a friend of the Cat Woman threatened legal action, claiming that the animals had been far more healthy-looking than the half-starved wretches depicted by the *IPN*'s artists. The *IPN* editor George Purkess replied that the illustration was based on drawings provided by a local artist, although it might of course be that this individual had been mistaken, and that Mrs Chantrell was more sinned against than sinning.

It turned out that the Chantrell's will had been 'doctored' by his wife, with the help of a dodgy solicitor. In May 1874, the Court of Probate awarded the old architect's worldly possessions to the children from his first marriage. Later the same year, the Cat Woman was twice more prosecuted for cruelty to animals. The enraged locals broke down her front door, to allow the constables to enter. Although the Cat Woman flew at them with a poker, yelling like a lunatic, she was unable to prevent the constables from removing the emaciated cats and dogs, which all had to be put down. She was sentenced to two months in prison, and heavily fined. Ivy Cottage was later repossessed and sold at auction. The Cat Woman may well have ended her days in an asylum. On a brighter note, her daughter Marion Felicia, whose childhood must have been unconventional, to say the least, later married and went to Australia, where she became an artist and musician.

Animal hoarding by various deranged people is a phenomenon regularly reported in the newspapers. A confused, elderly person is found in a squalid, delapidated house or flat, surrounded by rubbish, waste, and miserable, half-starved animals. The psychopathology of this maladaptive, destructive behaviour is poorly understood, although it is believed there is a link to obsessive-compulsive disorders. Three quarters of animal hoarders are women, often living in squalour, equally incapable of recognising the neglect to themselves or the cruelty to the animals. In fact, just like the Cat Woman, they claim to be great friends of animals, and 'rescue' poor cats and dogs from the cruel outside world. A recent review on animal hoarding has claimed that this phenomenon was first described in 1981, but there were in fact several instances of this unsavoury phenomenon from Victorian times, the Cat Woman of Rottingdean probably the most extreme of them. Certain types of aberrant human behaviour, whether stalking of celebrities or hoarding animals, have existed for hundreds of years, although they have gone under different names.

Sources: *For the Cat Woman and her career, see also Liverpool Mercury, 24 May 1867; Derby Mercury, 28 April 1875; Glasgow Herald, 13+14 Feb; Birmingham Daily Post 3 Sept; Reynolds's Newspaper, 25 Oct 1874. On animal hoarding, see the papers by SE Davis (California Lawyer, Sept 2002, pp26–29), C Berry et al. (Animal Law 11 [2005], pp167–194) and GJ Patronek & JN Nathanson (Clinical Psychology Review 29 [2009], pp274–281). For recent animal hoarders, see* ***FT184:9; 205:8–9****.*

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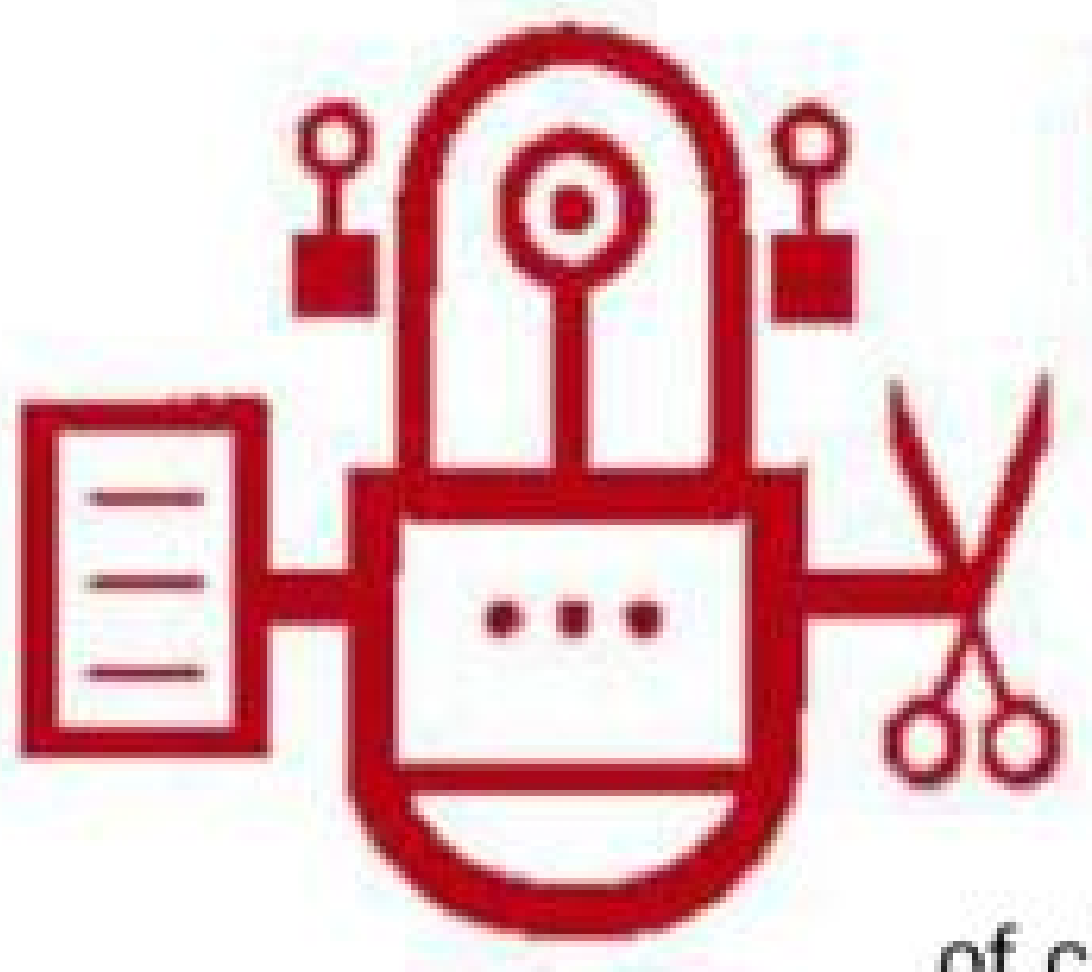

Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 8 Jan 2012. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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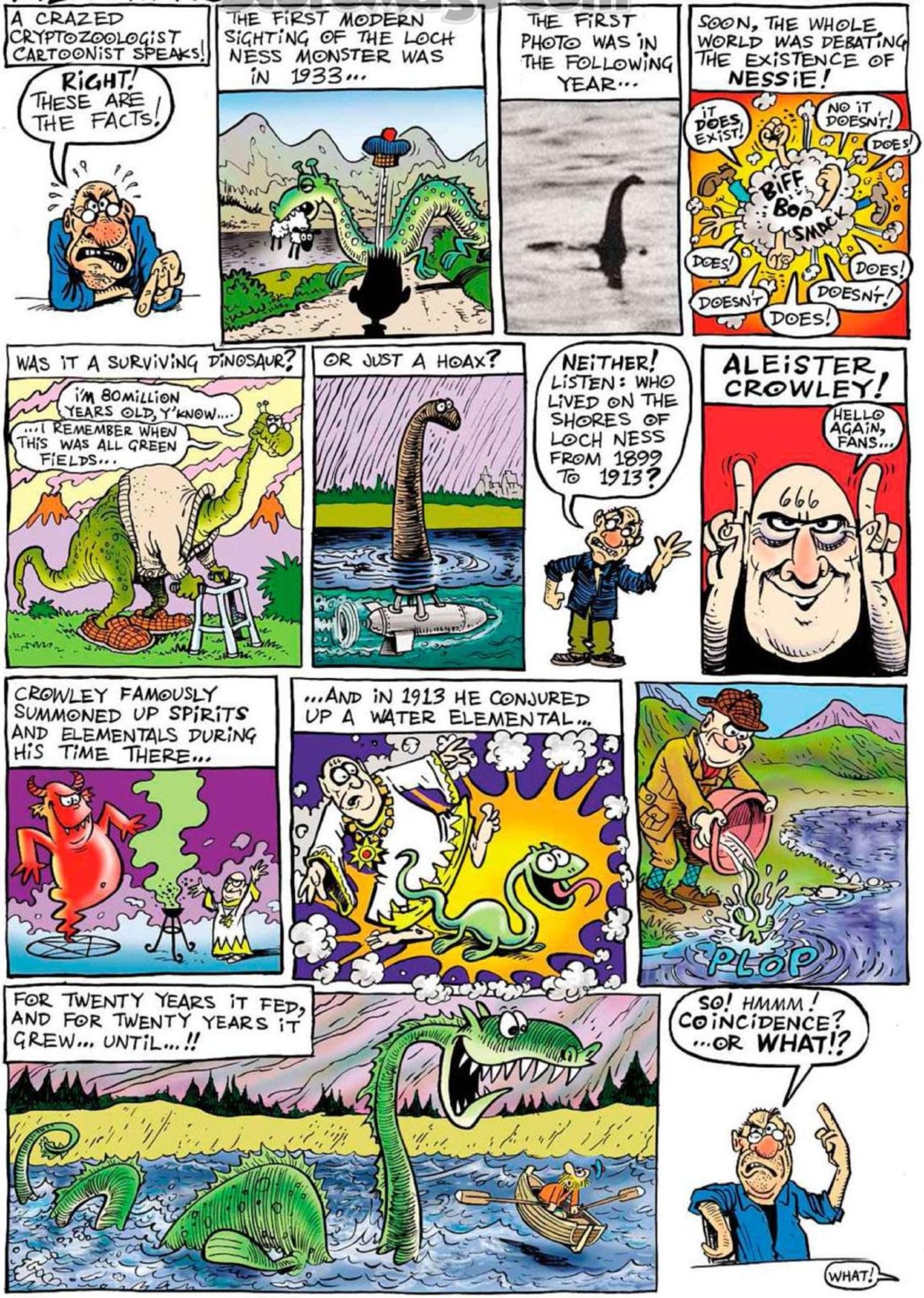
PHENOMENOMIX

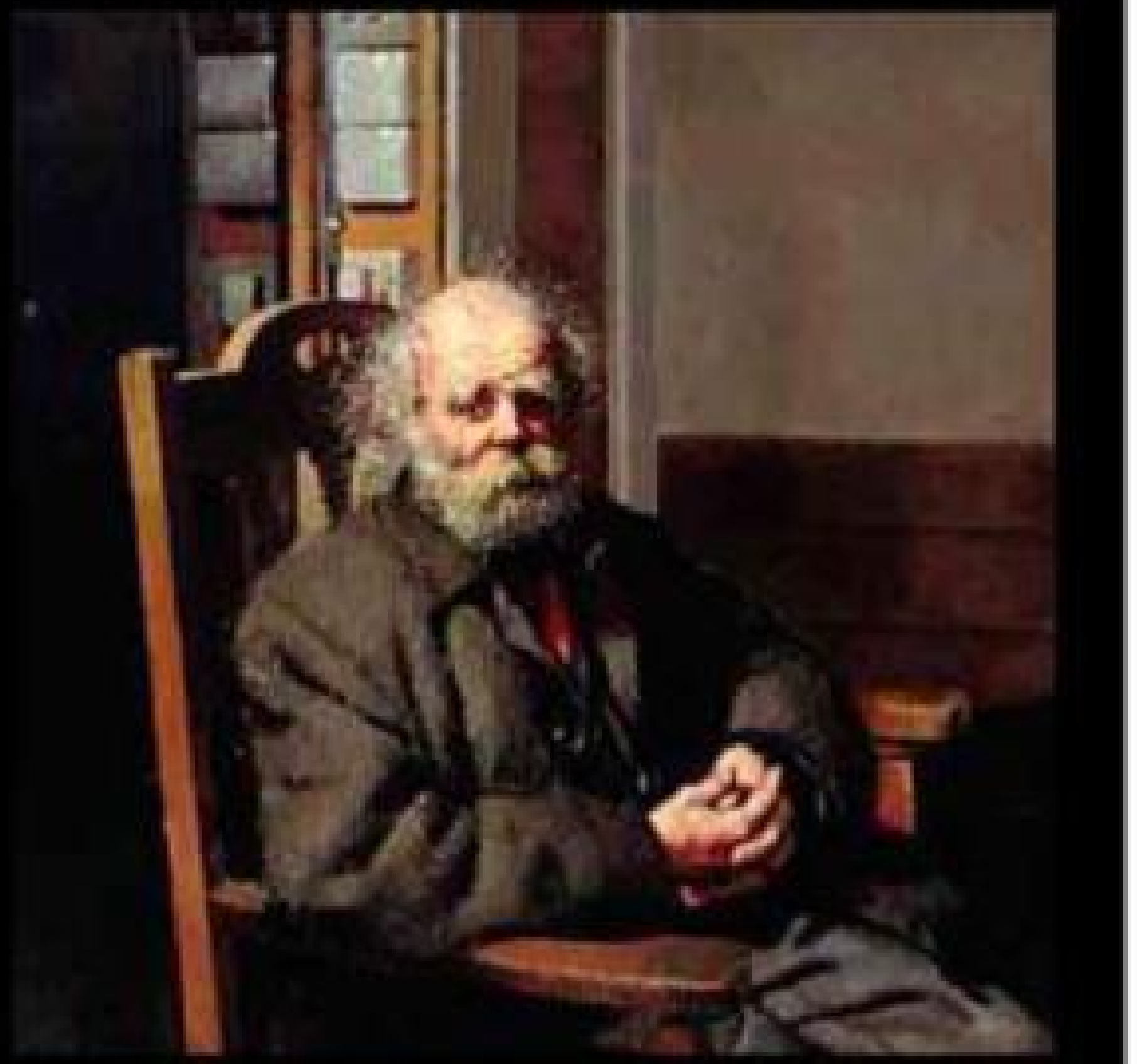
HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON


A CRAZED CRYPTOZOOLOGIST CARTOONIST SPEAKS!
RIGHT! THESE ARE THE FACTS!
THE FIRST MODERN SIGHTING OF THE LOCH NESS MONSTER WAS IN 1933...
THE FIRST PHOTO WAS IN THE FOLLOWING YEAR...
SOON, THE WHOLE WORLD WAS DEBATING THE EXISTENCE OF NESSIE!
IT DOES EXIST!
NO IT DOESN'T!
DOES!
BIFF
BOP
SMACK
DOES!
DOES!
DOESN'T
DOESN'T!
DOES!
WAS IT A SURVIVING DINOSAUR?
I'M 80 MILLION YEARS OLD, Y'KNOW....
...I REMEMBER WHEN THIS WAS ALL GREEN FIELDS...
OR JUST A HOAX?
NEITHER! LISTEN: WHO LIVED ON THE SHORES OF LOCH NESS FROM 1899 TO 1913?
ALEISTER CROWLEY!
HELLO AGAIN, FANS...
666
CROWLEY FAMOUSLY SUMMONED UP SPIRITS AND ELEMENTALS DURING HIS TIME THERE...
...AND IN 1913 HE CONJURED UP A WATER ELEMENTAL...
PLOP
FOR TWENTY YEARS IT FED, AND FOR TWENTY YEARS IT GREW... UNTIL...!!
SO! HMMM! COINCIDENCE? ...OR WHAT!?
WHAT!

COMING NEXT MONTH

APOCALYPSE 2012

PREDICTIONS, PROPHECIES AND THE FINAL COUNTDOWN...



THE ART OF DYING

THE PENNILESS PAINTER AND HIS PICKLED TRAMP

+

CORRIE SAUCERS, KENT SEA MONSTER, AERIAL MYSTERIES AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 285

ON SALE 2 FEBRUARY

HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

FEBRUARY 1982

What drove a respectable West German dentist "mad" enough to "feign a crime" (as a prosecutor put it) of projecting a voice out of his chair-side spittoon and office lavatory? For nearly a year, a mystery voice, which called itself 'Chopper', taunted the dentist and his staff and patients up to 90 times a day in a gruff Bavarian accent, so loudly that patients fled. To give you a flavour of the phenomenon: when one female patient was on the lavatory, a voice from beneath her boomed, "Move your arse, I can't see a thing." This month, the dentist, in desperation, filed a suit against unknown persons with the Regensberg authorities. The voice even came from a disconnected phone. The case attracted the attention of Germany's foremost poltergeist hunter, Dr Hans Bender. On his arrival at the practice, in Neutraubling, Chopper was heard to wail: "Bender is here. I'm scared." The dentist and his young female assistant both became the butt of salacious rumours. It didn't help that the dentist's surname was Bachseitz. Repeated investigations by police, engineers and parapsychologists failed to find the identity of Chopper conclusively. Was it all a hoax? The prosecutor and an eminent parapsychologist thought so, accusing the girl of using ventriloquism. A more popular rumour posited a modern-day 'phantom of the opera' operating from secret tunnels under the town. There are tantalising videos – e.g. http://bit.ly/tt827d (YouTube). **FT38:24–25**

We've reported some bizarre things over the years, but one of the oddest must be the unsolved mystery of the night visitor to the Craig family's first floor balcony in the harbour at Huntingdon Beach, California. Three times in two months, someone – or something – visited it during the night and left a very large turd. Neither the police, nor several local authorities were of any help in solving the identity of the visitor. However, a vet's examination of these disturbing deposits determined that they were the work of a huge pig, a creature not known to roam the harbour area – or to climb balconies. A decade later, we reported on the body of an 86-year-old lady found seated on her balcony in the Stockholm suburb of Traneberg, on 16 March 1992. Police concluded she had died while watching fireworks on New Year's Eve. **FT45:36**; **64:13**

FEBRUARY 1992

Amateur entomologist Ray Gabriel, conducting a survey of bees in Swindon's Coate Water Park, spotted an unusual bee, which he chased, killed, and took home to examine under a microscope. It turned out to be a rare Cuckoo bee (*Nomada xanthostica*), the first to be seen in Britain since 1949. The Cuckoo bee is on the 'endangered' list and had been thought close to extinction. "This might be the last one in existence," said Ray ruefully, "and I've just killed it." **FT64:9**

The prestigious All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, in New Delhi, is a curious clash of the old and new. Patients benefiting from the latest surgical treatment might have found themselves waking up with a monkey in their bed or fiddling with their drips. The rhesus monkeys, numbering over 200, were descended from a group that escaped from the hospital's labs 20 years earlier; efforts to control them were hampered by the religious respect accorded them as incarnations of the monkey god Hanuman. They raided fridges in local homes, jumped on buses terrorising the passengers, and often roamed as far as three miles (4.8km) away where they wreaked havoc in the city's administrative quarter with "orgies of file shredding". Only private wards at the hospital were protected by wire mesh screens. The problem persisted; a decade later, we reported that these hairy hooligans numbered more than 10,000, and a city plan to loose a number of larger langur monkeys to scare them away only made matters worse. Reported incidents went up by 55 per cent. **FT64:22**; **145:9**; **148:14**; **159:27**

FEBRUARY 2002

Colombian police reported that there might be up to 50 groups of 'human vampires' operating in Bogota city – and didn't quite know what to make of them. They were tolerated when they simply dressed in black and drank a cocktail of brandy and blood obtained legally from transfusion centres and abattoirs. But 'recently' mugging reports increased – people were being held at gunpoint while their neck veins were slit and fresh blood drunk. Police said the problem might have been widespread, as few victims had come forward for fear of ridicule. The police chief said he couldn't simply order the stopping and searching of people dressed as vampires under the freedom of religion laws. **FT158:16**

How to Become a Successful Writer!

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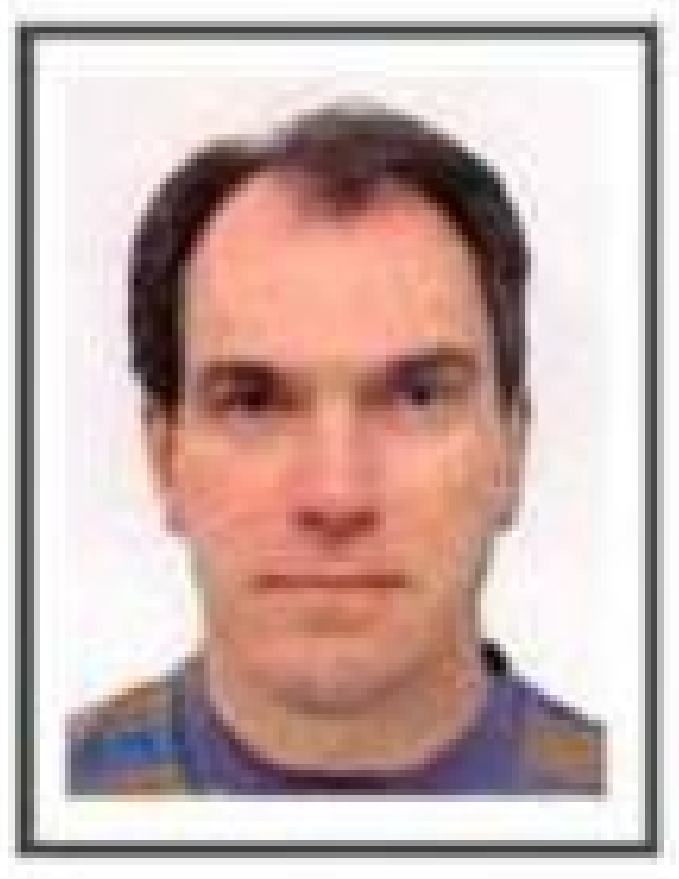

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